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# INSPIRATION

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A Study of Divine Influence and Authority in the Holy Scriptures

By
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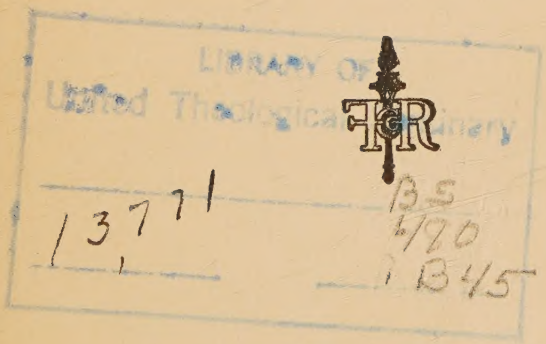
*Editor of The Continent*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*Dedicated*

*With Devoted Filial Affection*

*to*

*MRS. CYRUS H. McCORMICK, Senior.*

# Preface

DISCUSSION between conservative and progressive theologians reveals one difference in viewpoint which accounts for all their other differences. Briefly it may be said that the inspiration of the Bible is the single central issue on which they are at odds. But even that statement of it would exaggerate the breadth of their actual dissension. That the Bible is inspired by divine wisdom for the religious edification of mankind both would instantly consent. What the effect is of that inspiration on the quality of the Bible is the much narrower question on which alone evangelical opinion differs radically. If at this point some measure of common understanding could be had in Protestant churches, unseemly contention would almost cease to mar their peace.

The heat of feeling excited by controversy over the inspiration of the Scriptures is, however, not difficult to explain. To understand it one needs but to bear in mind how fundamentally Protestant Christianity has reposed its reliance on the written word of God. To multitudes of the devout it is literally terrifying to hear respecting the Bible the least suggestion of shifting interpretation. If the Bible is not a "constant" in the problem of life, what can be rested on?

The question is a natural one and naturally most

poignant where the scholarly studies that produce so many new theories concerning the Scriptures are least understood. Criticism which in the schools seems commonplace and incidental is likely to appear in the eyes of the average man who lives by the Bible a direct assault on his spiritual security. Almost invariably he attributes to it a destructive influence which those with whom it originated would think ludicrous. None the less it is unchristianly cruel to scorn the alarms which such persons feel; rather a brotherly consideration should be alert to assure them of a loyalty as earnest as their own toward Jesus the Christ.

In the last analysis it is only men committed mind and soul to the paramount fact that "the Son of Man hath authority on earth to forgive sins," who are competent or entitled to interpret the gospel revelation on either old presumptions or new. On the other hand, the gospel revelation can never be in peril of being distorted by true and passionate lovers of a saving Christ, whether their premises of interpretation are new or old. On this spiritual certainty may all Bible-lovers rest. There is naught to fear even from those who deal in novelties of Bible exegesis as long as in their lives may be discerned the "fruits of the Spirit." It is the highest Name which underwrites the universal law of religion: "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit."

N. R. B.

*New York.*

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# I

## THE VOICE OF GOD

AN inquiry into the nature of Biblical inspiration can be of interest only to those whose philosophy of things human and divine does not exclude the conception of God communicating His thoughts to the mind of man. A thinker who has convinced himself that no human intellect could receive or transmit the direct impressions of a divine Intelligence, can scarcely be engaged by a study of how the Bible expresses the mind of God. His only answer can be that a book humanly produced expresses human minds and nothing more.

With as many, however, as have not tied up the possibilities of the universe into so small a parcel of their own opinion, the mere supposition of a volume conveying to mankind a message of supernatural origin should suffice to rouse a concern to know its credentials and appraise the extent of divine influence exercised through it. And the more profoundly any reader is persuaded of the reality of such claims for the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, the more earnestly eager should he be to value precisely the worths imparted to these writings by the impress of divinity upon them. Assuredly a man who has come to rever-

ence the Bible as a—or let us rather say, the—book of God, will be equally anxious neither by fanatic superstition to load it with significances that God never intended, nor by critical skepticism to rob it of any meaning with which the infinite Wisdom purposed to invest it.

The effort here begun to outline such an appraisement of the qualities of Holy Scripture proceeds then on the frank assumption that a revelation of the will of the universal Creator to His human creatures is not only a possibility through the medium of a book penned wholly by human hands, but in the volume of the Bible has become an actuality. The assumption is of course a premise of faith rather than a conclusion of logic. Even if occasion permitted the matter to be argued, argument would never demonstrate it. The ways of God like the being of God transcend syllogisms.

Nevertheless logic need take no offense at the premise of divine revelation. Many considerations commend the idea to a reasonable philosophy—considerations drawn from the common experience of the race and especially from the historic experience of Christians. Most patent of the facts that sustain it is the Bible itself. Saying this is not begging the question. A Bible "of the earth earthy" would indeed be, no matter what its own claims in its own behalf, poor testimony to the reality of truth's communication from heaven. But the Bible that we have has long since impressed the world with a character to which it is

far from absurd to attach the thesis of a heavenly derivation.

To be sure, for those whose inclinations turn that way it is easy to single out from the Scriptures—especially from their primitive portions—illustrations of crudities unmistakably human, for the origin of which no half-way candid reader would look higher than a this-world plane. But whoever is willing to do the Bible the justice of judging it in whole and not in part, must confess that in its loftier portions it soars to elevations of sublimity well worthy of an ultimate authorship in the mind of God. As the Westminster Confession of Faith says so finely, it is "the heavenliness of the matter" which the Bible contains that justifies regarding it as a heavenly product.

There is, of course, no compulsion on any man's judgment to admit this divine authorship if he chooses to deny it. It is open to him to maintain that the noblest of Bible passages reflect nothing but the genius of men. In that case, however, he will be constrained to speak of amazing Bible men whose feet have "climbed the steep ascent of heaven" to a more convincing apprehension of who God is and how He loves than the greatest of sages elsewhere have attained. But one who says God helped them to the truth, has no need to speak of a remarkable God. If God indeed had a hand in the making of the Bible, its most glittering peaks are not loftier than a rational expectation of Omniscience, looking upward, may survey without surprise.

The awesome drama of Job, where God Himself appears as an actor; the glorious hymns of faith and praise which the psalmists sang; the thrilling oratory of impassioned prophets denouncing evil with voices of thunder and illuminating righteousness with the lure of unquenchable light; above all the "meek and lowly" voice of Jesus Christ, unfolding, with ineffable gentleness but a strangely commanding power, the way of that mystic life which eschews self and inherits eternal joy—these things, if from man and only from man, are wonders for which history and criticism have yet to account. But if one says they are from God, all is accounted for the instant the word is spoken.

But the greater—yes, the greatest—argument for the authentic revealment of the Creator among and to His creatures is afforded not by a book but by a Life—a Life recorded indeed in a book but so vitally distinct from all that is written of it that still after twice a thousand years it continues to dominate the mind of the world with the independent force of embodied fact. Nothing was more distinctively characteristic of the Son of Man than His consciousness that the Father who sent Him was always with Him and through Him was manifest to the men who were His own daily companions. Of those companions it was later said that those who watched them "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Even so mankind, watching the figure of their great Friend and heeding His words, has taken

knowledge that He had been—has been—is—with God.

Without reference to theological conceptions of His Personality, it is impressively obvious that Jesus Christ's mighty and constant sense of God stands, for the modern man as for the original disciples, as the best of all pledges that the Soul of the Infinite does seek converse with the finite souls of this small planet, otherwise isolate in the ocean of space. In so far as Jesus was God, He was the demonstration that God craves fellowship with man. In so far as He was man, He was the demonstration that God can have fellowship with man and man with God. In either aspect the literal feasibility of divine revelation, guiding human thought, directing human action, is sustained by one wholly congruous example. And plainly what has been lived and felt may also be told and written. After Jesus a Bible is no longer a miracle. God manifest in the flesh renders God manifest in a volume of writing a simple and minor sequence.

With full confidence therefore in the rationality of the idea of "Scripture inspired of God," these studies base themselves on the single broad belief that the Lord of heaven and earth has "of old time spoken unto the fathers by the prophets in divers portions and in divers manners," and of those messages, as well as from that still nobler message "spoken unto us in His Son," has provided an authoritative and permanent record bequeathed to later generations that "through com-

fort of the Scriptures we might have hope." This, as already said, is a frankly confessed assumption —an unproved (but fitly believed) postulate from which inquiry sets out; for no inquiry makes progress except it has first determined what things it will leave behind unquestioned. Whoever therefore cannot consent that so much shall be held to be fixed and free of doubt, had best not go on by this road. Let him turn back and have out his own wrestle with first principles.

But grant that we are satisfied to accept the presumption of an actual revelation from God in a book certified by His providence and divinely adapted to instruct mankind in the changeless things of His purpose and will. Then we are ready to advance to the practical examination of that book, asking what are the seals and tokens of this august authorship which it has pleased the Lord to stamp upon it. By "divers manners," says the apostle, God has accomplished this transmission of His thoughts to the minds of men. What more fascinating pursuit can a studious brain propose to itself than the investigation of the particular manners which God has chosen to employ in making the Bible—discerning, if possible, by what standards of discrimination He has preferred one "manner" for one passage and some other "manner" for another of its "divers portions"?

Before entering, however, upon the highway of this attractive study it is necessary to post at the outset one warning sign. We have made one as-

sumption; let that in this direction be our end of both assuming and presuming. Not a philosophic riddle to be solved by hypotheses and presuppositions lies before us, but a tangible phenomenon of literature, as challenging to scientific determination of fact as the firmament of sun and stars overhead. Not what the Bible might be, nor even what (in our opinion) it ought to be, is the object of our just interest; we desire to know simply and only what the Bible is. Too long, by both those who would magnify and those who would disparage the significance of inspiration, has tedious theorizing been indulged over what God must do or could not do if He undertook to inspire a book of permanent religious authority for His children on earth. For such vain disputation there is but one terminus, and that is the common willingness of all concerned to quiet their own clamour and look in the Bible to see what in fact God has done.

## II

## THE AGENCY OF THE SPIRIT

AN inspired Bible must depend on the reality of personal spiritual contact between men and God. But so, too, according to evangelical faith, does the daily Christian life of the simplest of private disciples. Each means actual divine-human intercommunication. If God does not in very truth impart energy, illumination, guidance, to individual human souls in this world, then indeed we have no book of divine authority, but by the same token there are no lives directed by heavenly impulse to the service of Christ. And it can only be by the same Holy Spirit that the divine impacts are transmitted which accomplish both these purposes. It is not one Spirit who speaks messages for prophets to repeat to vast national multitudes and another Spirit who speaks counsel for the private Christian to apply to his own personal perplexities. It is in each case the same Voice. But is it the same sort of speech?

"There are," says Paul, "diversities of workings, but the same God who worketh all things in all." How wide is the diversity here? When God in a now far antiquity inspired twoscore men (or thereabouts) to write what He has since collected into the canon of Holy Scripture, did He exert

over them some mystic influence brought into play upon humanity neither before nor since? Or did He but enter those minds by the same silent channels through which He still daily responds to suppliants for the wisdom which, James declares, He gives with limitless liberality to all men who care to request it? Was it by some forcible seizure of their mental powers that these authors of the Bible writings were compelled to pen what God desired? Or were the promptings which guided them the same character of unspoken urge within the soul by which devout men still in this prosaic day are sure that the heavenly Father affords leading in religious duty? What, in a word, is the essential quality of Bible inspiration? And how distinctive is it, as compared with other guiding influences by which the heavenly Father in every age teaches each child of His the path of His pleasure?

On this problem, which seems so central to the question which these studies have undertaken to pursue, it is surprising to find how little help the Bible itself affords. One finds that the writers of Scripture were not at all disposed to analyze their own psychology. Perhaps it is fair to say that the Hebrew race, to which they belonged, never did develop that form of self-consciousness. At all events, not one Bible writer furnishes the least clue to let us know how it felt to be writing under God's inspiration works sacred to later ages.

A few are rather explicit about the visions and theophanies whereby matter for their messages was made known to them—John in the Revelation

is especially notable for this—but not even these suggest anything other than the normal action of the human mind in the memory which retained these communications for record or even in the habits of verbal composition which gave to them literary form. The prophets who begin nearly every paragraph with "Thus saith Jehovah" but seldom relate by what means—sound for the outer ear or impression on the inward thought—they heard Jehovah's sayings. And for much the greater part of the contents of the Bible it may be taken as certain that the authors came by the facts and thoughts of their writings in a manner not consciously different from the production of any other literature of similar sincerity. Scripture historians questioned eye-witnesses or consulted documents; poets and psalmists wrote as the surge of life experience within them drove them to write; the apostles sent letters to the churches for just the same reason that men write letters to-day—they had something urgent to say to their friends.

It appears accurate to add that no author represented in the Biblical canon had any conception, as he wrote, that he was contributing to a book of permanent divine revelation for all mankind. To that thought the nearest approach must have been realized by Moses and those who worked with him or after him on the "book of the law" for the Israelitish nation. They, of course, had no idea of reaching beyond the circle of their own people, but as patriots they no doubt anticipated

an endless national force for the statutes they were recording. Is it cynical to observe the historic irony of the fact that the only portion of the Bible which the twentieth century finds obsolete is the Levitical code, which to these ancient Hebrews seemed perpetual?

For the rest of the Scriptures it seems true without qualification that its various books were committed to writing under as immediate an urgency as a modern preacher preaches a sermon or a modern compiler might undertake to preserve the records of the late war. Each such writing was in its own way a tract for the times. And the Biblical authors were preëminently men of contemporary minds intent on serving their own respective generations.

To that end they wrote, as the case might demand of each according to his special talent, memoirs of a heroic or a shameful national past to inspire or restrain the people's current tempers; burning exhortations to waken conscience for living sins and responsibility for living duties; songs of hope in dark or light to cheer the hearts of spiritual pilgrims; dawn-bright foretellings of salvation and refreshment destined in God's messianic plans yet to reward the discouraged and weary; loving transcripts of those words which were spoken as man never spake, so that those who never saw Jesus none the less might remember Him; and simplest of all, friendly letters hurriedly penned to carry to one and another group of beloved fellow Christians such quick warning

and instant instruction as they were thought to be at the moment in need of. There are the materials—each serving the passing day but each instinct with a seed of perpetuity that their original penmen never guessed—which remain to constitute the invaluable treasure of the Holy Bible.

If in qualification of these remarks any saying of Scripture could be cited, it would no doubt be out of the first chapter of Peter's first epistle, where, having voiced the early Christian's passionate love of the recently ascended Lord, the apostle harks back to the messianic prophecies which foretold a Saviour's coming:

"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you, searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them. To whom it was revealed that not unto themselves but unto you did they minister these things."

It must appear plain, however, on study that these words do not contradict but confirm the generalization that Bible writers wrote for their times and not with the object or hope of helping to create a perpetual religious literature. The allusion of Peter does not, of course, extend beyond those passages in the Old Testament that foretell the appearance of a Messiah among the Jews—passages of the highest significance yet small in extent as compared with the whole bulk of that

Testament. Not even these prophecies, however, are by Peter's affirmation classed as conscious contributions to a permanent Bible.

Indeed, the implication is quite the opposite. Peter rather signifies that the Spirit of God prompted the prophets to speak and write, for the encouragement of their own contemporaries, the blessed message which promised the world a Saviour, but to their disappointment forbade them to anticipate an early fulfillment of the promise. They had thus to leave to the future what they would have been joyful to welcome in their own day, and the predictions which they recorded for their own neighbours stood to be the comfort also of other long generations intervening before the fullness of time had arrived. The prophets, therefore, may have dreamed of their prophecies surviving till the divine One did appear, but that does not say that they had knowledge or even intimation of a destiny that was to make their writings imperishable till the end of time.

Yet, if totally unaware of any afflatus that lifted them to the plane of timeless oracles, these Scriptural authors were intensely conscious, as almost every page of their manuscript shows, of that other fellowship with the Spirit of God which is the covenant privilege of every devout soul. The long destiny of their writings they had no way of foreseeing, but they fully appreciated the imminent importance of making a mighty mark for God in the generation alive at the hour when each man wrote. And well they knew that such

a service is to be accomplished by no merely human cleverness or adroit literary device. They hoped to speak and write for God not by might nor by power but only by the aid and guidance of His Spirit. Just as a true minister of the word of God in this day makes first preparation for his sermon by prayer and meditative invitation of divine influences, so the prophets of old communed with God long and with even agonizing desire before they dared utter in His name their "Thus saith."

Of course, it must not be assumed that the modes of experience by which Bible writers were admitted to participate in the mind of God were never different from the modes of experience which are common to men of to-day. No one with any due conception of what omnipotence signifies would dare the effrontery of setting limits to the means by which God may work out His purposes. In a time when the instrumentalities through which God could reveal His will were fewer, and perhaps the spiritual apprehension of the race cultivated to a far less degree of sensitiveness than now, it may well have been that means of communication more objective than He uses to-day, were necessary. And if necessary the infinite God would not be hampered in His resources.

There are many references to visions and dreams, in the older Testament especially, to which current religious experience affords no parallel. But lack of that kind of verification for divine messages now is no disproof of the reality of it

then. Nevertheless, even in the prophetic books the impression is strong that the men who spoke for God of old time heard the word of their proclamation oftenest in the prayerful silence of their own souls—just where the evangelical church today expects its preachers to receive the Spirit's sanction for the substance of their preaching.

It is noticeable that Paul frankly declared that what he heard when caught up to the third heaven was not usable for any earthly ministry. What method of revelation brought him (succeeding his conversion vision) the gospel he did preach—which he always insisted was transmitted to him without human intermediation—he nowhere has hinted. But those delightfully naive passages in the seventh chapter of First Corinthians (where the apostle acknowledges that he has "no commandment of the Lord" and so must "give my judgment," in which, he adds, "I think I also have the Spirit of God") carry the very ring of voice which would seem natural to a present-day evangelist—absolute assurance on the great things of God, but on matters of minor importance a hope rather than a surety of keeping in line with God's mind. Is it presumptuous then to imagine that Paul's certainties developed from experiences altogether similar to those through which many a lesser Christian has won his way to great triumphs of faith? What did that long stay in Arabia signify? Battles no doubt, such as hosts of souls have had to fight, struggling through floods of questionings to the solid rock of mighty

affirmations, of which his epistles have become an undying witness to edify a living Church.

There seems then to be discoverable no defined line of difference by which to distinguish the operation of the Spirit in the mind and soul of a Bible-writer from the same Spirit's guidance and governing of an average Christian's life along lines of average duty. The most positive conclusion to record on the subject is a negative one—there is absolutely no faintest shadow in Scripture of the widespread pagan notion that God could speak only through a mind robbed of normal faculties. The Bible sets utterly no store on the mantic ravings out of which the Greeks thought they could gather divine oracles.

The true God got His Bible written, as He gets all His other works in the world done, by men using for Him all the gifts and capacities with which He endowed them. The Holy Spirit has no preference for low-grade mental tools. It is a far greater thing to know that He is capable of using the keenest of tools appropriately for His several intents. If by no external test is it possible to say how the inspiration of a book differs from the inspiration of a life, yet the fact that for different purposes the Spirit inspires both is sufficient assurance that in each case the purpose is adequately accomplished. Each case is the deed of a perfect Wisdom. The matter rests in the satisfying deduction that the Bible which God has made is every whit the Bible man needs.

## III

## THE MATERIALS OF REVELATION

NO exact distinction, it has just been said, can be defined by the human observer between the movements of the Holy Spirit anciently in the minds of Bible authors and the movements of the same Spirit to-day in the souls of common Christians. Yet a vast difference in effect is apparent. No Bible is developing in the twentieth century. Hosts of men, the Church believes, continue to this day to speak and write in the power of the Spirit. But neither from their speech nor from their writing does there anywhere arise an authority comparable for a moment to the sway—the universal sway, we may well say—of those ancient Scriptures which after the lapse of millenniums remain dominant over the moral world. What accounts for such singular and unfading supremacy? If it is indeed true that no external phenomenon of authorship distinguishes the Bible from other books, how does it come nevertheless to be so potently different?

A process of selection tacitly attesting the Bible's contents is evident on the face of things. The works included (unless exactness requires that an exception be made for the two books by Luke, the Greek physician) are wholly the product

of a single race, but by no means the whole literature of that race. The earliest Biblical records mention other Hebraic writings seemingly in their day more famous and, it would appear, quite as devoutly religious, which despite that missed the immortality of a place in the Scriptures. The repudiation of the Old Testament apocrypha by the best scholars of primitive Christianity excluded from the Bible sphere another large body of Hebrew thought by no means devoid of historical, intellectual and spiritual merits. As for psalms it cannot be supposed that a people so ready in the praises of God sang no more than a hundred and fifty of these hymns of the soul in all the centuries of their national life. Solomon alone is recorded to have written more songs and spoken more proverbs than the whole Bible contains.

The books of Kings and Chronicles confess themselves abridgments of more copious histories extant in their epoch. Numerous prophets who appear dimly in the background of the Old Testament scene must in many cases have written down for their contemporaries the truth from God as they heard it, but failed to win the preservation of their words to later generations. On the other hand, much apocalyptic literature, such as in a later period of Jewish history became the favourite vehicle of "popular preaching," was cherished and handed down along lines of pious descent for a great while before the canon of our existing Bible was closed, yet found neither part nor lot in that sublime monument of the Hebrew mind.

The same sort of selective sifting is further manifest through the New Testament within the scope of purely Christian literature. The introduction to Luke's Gospel in particular illuminates this fact. The "beloved physician" who came to Jerusalem with Paul and chose to remain in Judea as long as his great friend was imprisoned there, was impressed not with the scarcity but with the multiplicity of written memoirs of Jesus, then being handed about in manuscript among Jewish Christians. Not a few but "many" had "taken in hand" to tell that wonderful story of the Son of God who became Son of Man. And there is no trace of conscious superiority over that multitude in the quiet phrase, "It seemed good to me also," by which Luke explained his resolve to include himself in the loyal and reverent group of such biographers.

Could the evangelist have had—as he certainly did not have—a miraculous prevision of the New Testament now possessed by the Christian Church, he would doubtless have been amazed to behold but four gospels surviving to subsequent ages of religion. And perhaps he would have been still more surprised to see his own story of Jesus supplanting all but two—more likely, all but one—of the numerous manuscripts in circulation when he sat down to write. For surely in Luke's modest commendation of his work to Theophilus there is no suggestion of a conceit proposing to do better a task bungled before, but only of a humble joy in being permitted to try his skill also at a task rich in

privilege to any disciple who loved the memory of the gentle Nazarene.

Much the same that is thus said of Luke might be said of his still more gifted mentor, instructor and example, the mighty Apostle Paul. For Paul too was a humble man and must have had, if possible, less imagination than Luke of bequeathing anything of his writing to be a standard of doctrine for all succeeding Christendom. As has been already observed, he used his pen not for obtaining to himself the dateless fame which has become his meed from history, but for the intensely practical and right-at-hand necessity of setting his fellow believers right where they had missed some of the meaning of Christianity.

The apostle, of course, was aware that the pleasure of God had long contemplated a supreme book bestowed on men for their religious guidance. He well knew that book as it existed in his day and revered it as containing "sacred writings" able to make men "wise unto salvation." He was happy that his spiritual son Timothy had known those writings from infancy; doubtless his own knowledge of the same book went back also to young childhood, and he would have no child grow up without its divine counsel. And quite possibly Paul realized that for all God's purposes the Holy Scriptures would still require a supplement—something to explain better how the salvation forecast in the law and the prophets of the old Jewish Bible was now to be realized "through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

But that thirteen of his own letters would go into that new supplement on "salvation,"—this, it is surely safe to say, absorbed and self-forgetful Paul never dreamed of. More to the point here, however—since this unanticipated immortalization for writers of Scripture has already been dwelt upon—is the probably greater puzzle in the mind of the apostle if he had attempted to account for the fact that only thirteen were used. Why these and no more? Without doubt these thirteen constituted but a portion—very likely a minor portion—of the correspondence he had penned through all his long missionary career, with "anxiety for all the churches pressing on him daily."

Paul was a born letter-writer and he could not long have worried over any of these far-away circles of disciples without reaching for pen and parchment or stylus and tablet. No doubt he dispatched to distant friends many an epistle which the recipients carelessly failed to preserve. In fact, from his own allusions (1 Corinthians 5: 9; 2 Corinthians 2: 4) we know the apostle sent one, and very likely two, letters to the church of Corinth which that church appears not to have prized enough to keep. By these lost epistles may be illustrated one of the crucial questions involved in this inquiry.

Considering that all this correspondence with the Corinthians ran in a single connected series, dealing with various ramifications of one problem, is it conceivable that Paul could have written the surviving and the lost epistles under a differing

spell of divine impulse? If Dr. David Smith's interpretation is correct, it is the second and the fourth of these letters which stand now as integral parts of God's authoritative Bible, acknowledged as inspired by all evangelical scholars. The first and the third are those which have disappeared. But who in such a case would be willing to say that the Spirit who watches over all the churches descended to the apostle with a divine inspiration only after his first (now lost) epistle to the Corinthians was penned and temporarily withdrew once more after the second (called in the New Testament the First) had been finished.

An apostle with the problem of the unruly Corinthian congregation on his hands was in no situation to be content with intermittent flashes of divine illumination. He continually needed all the godly wisdom—all the protection against error in judgment or instruction—which the divine Spirit could in any case impart to an earthly servant of God's truth. It certainly could not have been more important to insure right regulation and true orthodoxy for an American church in the twentieth century through the medium of an inspired book than it was to get a straight start for an infant congregation in the initial age of Christianity through the oversight and agency of a living apostle. Can it be too bold then to say that the Lord did not give the Spirit in stinted measure to Paul at any time, whether he was writing to the Corinthians his first, second, third or fourth letter of counsel—that the lost writing was just as fully

inspired as that which we read in this day when we open the Bible to First and Second Corinthians?

If we affirm, however, that the inspiration of God may (or even must) have been as "plenary" for much of His word that never got within the covers of Holy Scriptures as it is for the historically accepted contents of that volume, let us make sure that we are grading up the oral and transient utterances of God's messengers and not grading down the values of the permanent record. Not otherwise will we be in harmony with the experience of prophets, psalmists, evangelists and apostles. For to none of these great heralds of God was it ever a commonplace and incidental matter to have the Spirit with them for any of the ministries which they rendered in God's name. All the wonder that they could possibly have given to the thought of heavenly Wisdom permeating a book of revelation for mankind they daily felt in themselves as they realized the equal miracle of God coöperating with them in their work—employing them in His work.

This exalted estimation of a divine immanence in common life which we modern Christians are apt to dismiss as unimportant—if not wholly mystical and theoretic—is accounted for in these ancients by the much higher value than our usual insight supports which they put on the daily business of serving God. That was to them colossal business, and required all the power possibly to be obtained for it from the reservoir of Omnipo-

tence. So men still should think. If a preacher really understands what a divine duty it is to preach a weekly gospel sermon and make it count for men's salvation, he will scarcely believe it a greater—though it may very well be a different—power which one would need to write a Bible.

He who gives over therefore the attempt to describe and distinguish the exact potential of divine dynamic requisite to inspire a competent book of revelation, is in no wise consenting to evaporate the book's authority. He may be refusing to measure how much of God is in the book, for he may have learned by exploration of the greatness of God how futile (if not foolish) it is for the human philosopher to mark bounds for the coming and going of the Eternal Spirit. But as long as one says, "God is in the book," he has said what is all sufficient, for he has said that enough of God is there.

Enough of God is there to insure that the diverse contents assembled from many sources to constitute the holy volume have been drawn together by the magnetism of an infallible Intelligence. It is not an aimless or formless conglomerate. Out of materials vaster than could possibly have been incorporated into any single Bible for human use, God in His own time by His own selection of appropriate elements has made a Bible as it has pleased Him. Its power unimpaired through the rolling centuries is the adequate demonstration of the rightness of His choice and the perfection of His work.

## IV

## THE PROVIDENCE OF THE CANON

IF it is appreciated that in the very times when the Holy Scriptures were taking form, the inspiration of God pervaded utterances and documents far more numerous than a volume of the usable size of the Bible could preserve, there is introduced into the study of inspiration a factor not commonly considered. Superabundance of materials at hand for any kind of construction always compels selection. This is as true in the making of a book as in the building of a house. When therefore God was compiling a book for men, His first necessity (to speak after a human manner) was to choose, from the plentiful mass of what He had taught His trusted servants to think, speak and write, such portions as were in their nature most suitable to the purposes which that book was to fulfill.

Contemplating this process of selection, the reader of the Bible which resulted from it can scarcely fail to feel the double sanction of divine authority conveyed thereby. On this view the contents found within the volume are not only what God originally wrought out through human minds governed by His Spirit but what by His

own specific choice He later marked as ageless in value and fit therefore to constitute the permanent guide-book of mankind. This makes the Bible like a great deed of trust, which on its face conveys a property of inestimable worth and afterward is indorsed with a sworn and bonded guarantee of title from the grantor Himself.

A distinct change of emphasis, however, must ensue where this thought of a Bible compiled out of a much larger inspired literature supplants the perhaps more prevalent thought of a Bible planned and composed as a unique religious unity under influences that have affected no other writing of men. By the latter conception the matter to be mainly insisted on as establishing the authority of the Scriptures is the Lord's direct appointment of each Biblical author to pen the particular portion of the Bible which it became his lot to compose. With this goes of course the belief that in a way altogether unparallelled by any human experience elsewhere the Holy Spirit presided over the mind of each writer until he had finished the stint of authorship assigned him.

From so exclusive a stress, however, on sixty-six separate miracles of supernatural control wrought for the production of the Bible's sixty-six documents, there often results a strange indifference to the means by which those sixty-six documents were at length assembled in the single book which to-day standardizes the faith and theology of Christendom. Men who are vehement champions of the plenary inspiration of each in-

dividual segment of Scripture, not infrequently indulge in slighting remarks about the ecclesiastical powers that shaped and finally closed the Biblical canon. Sometimes there are heard almost sneering references to the few votes, one way or the other, by which it is supposed in the councils of the ancient Church this or that book was put into or shut out of the Bible. The impression suggested is that the Spirit took the divinest pains to procure the writing of the various fractions of the Bible but left to chance their preservation and the canonical collection of them—that the parts of Scripture are inspired but their association in a single volume came to pass by some guideless accident.

All this appears to be a complete inversion of the logical values of the case. It is the Bible as a whole, as an intact book unified by its one ever controlling interest in the relations of God and man, which bulks on the sight of the world as the most potent phenomenon of universal literature. It is the mass impact of the volume which makes humanity bow to the moral authority of its teachings. It is not by its fragments but in its integral wholeness that it sways the mind of Christendom. The concentration of the Bible's sections and portions into a single harmonized unit of power is therefore a greater work than the first production of the various materials thus combined. Is it possible then that the Spirit of God would give an omniscient attention to what was less and leave to neglect what was more?

It has been already insisted in these studies that the Spirit's agency in the original composition of the Scriptural writings was actual and valid. But there is no inconsistency with that faith in adding now that the Spirit's agency in forming the canon —in binding up the completed book into one volume—was a still more unqualified intervention of the governing purposes of God. Moreover, it was an act of much more immediate consequence in attesting to mankind the supernatural reality of Biblical revelation.

That God's book should be commended to the trust and faith of humanity by His ratifying choice of the matter to be incorporated therein, is an idea much easier to make real to the twentieth-century mind than any thought of a Bible writer's intellect being preëmpted by a temporary divine Occupant. This is, of course, but little reason for maintaining that the former idea is truer than the latter. But it is good reason for setting the former fact to the forefront when one is inviting the modern man to put confidence in the Scriptures. And it also affords excellent ground for thinking that the Father in heaven, with His infallible foreknowledge of the minds He had given to men, would Himself exercise His most anxious care over His written revelation at the point where that care would be most evident and most convincing in the light of common earthly experience.

What God did in and through the intellects of the Bible authors—what illumination He shed on divine secrets, what certainties He sent to replace

uncertainties—is a speculation for which the ordinary Christian's consciousness of God may give but little suggestion. But that God knows how through the quiet workings of years on years to accomplish in the end the "bright designs" which Cowper says He "treasures up" for the good of His children, is an observation commonplace to Christian faith throughout the world. God is today doing just that, as He has been from the dawn of history; thousands of those who love and trust Him dare even now to testify that they have seen Him working so. Wickednesses accumulate; tumults turn the world upside down; the treacherous and evil man has his short triumph and the righteous suffers unspeakable affliction; but yet through clouds and darkness God moves on to His foreseen goal, and at length the thing He meant comes to pass and the world learns that its Creator is not defeated nor His good intent confounded.

Let us say then that the making of a Bible for the spiritual guidance of man is just another such "bright design" treasured patiently through centuries by the "God of patience"—as the Bible itself calls Him. How instantly—and how appropriately—the whole process in this light takes its place in that framework of providence wherein are comprehended the hopes of the devout for all good things present and to come. God watching and waiting through the centuries to accumulate just the words of direction by which His followers might best be guided to peace and security in a troublous world—what in all that is more mysteri-

ous or less credible than God planning through centuries to establish liberty, disseminate intelligence, suppress wrong and diffuse human good will? And where thousands and thousands from among even the agnostic and materialistic will acknowledge in the world the evidence of providential progress toward these latter aims, how shall a Christian doubt the hand of God in the giving of the Bible to the race of mankind? Is His hand too weak or His patience too hasty for the long enterprise?

Suppose it is indeed true that the decision which included one writing within the canon or excluded another has once and again seemed to turn on the whim of prejudiced scholars or the accident of a scant majority in some convocation of ecclesiastics. Do these things negative God? Is it not through the midst of far more precarious human contingencies that the heavenly Father pursues the path of His secular purposes? And does He not have His way in the end even when all the hosts of evil are in league to frustrate His intent? In the face of such abundant history to prove how even the wrath of man is overruled to the praise of divine power in other things, why should it be hard to believe that in this matter the voice of councils and the judgment of church fathers have been controlled to register at last a consensus on the contents of Scripture wholly agreeable to supreme Wisdom—accomplishing thus the completion of what in all remaining time was to be the "book of books" for every land and all people?

Providential selection of its component parts becomes then the great final seal by which the Church has warrant for its reliance on the Bible. By a method by which they know that their Guide is still working in the affairs of this world the people of God find themselves supplied with a mighty and satisfying manual of divine counsel. Its broad adequacy, its comprehensive worth, tested in the crucible of daily life to which it is subjected when men try to live by its precepts, justify the omnipotent toil of preparing it.

And this from every practical standpoint demonstrates the Bible's sufficient perfection. It meets the need it was made for. Should any man complain of peculiarities in the book's pages which he may think inconsistent with its asserted divinity, the perhaps crass but perfectly direct answer is that anything good enough for God should be good enough for him. The universe is full of proof that its Creator rejoices in things that work. The infinite mechanisms by which the stars are moved, the seasons made to roll round in due succession, and life and death brought into the harmony of an endless rhythm, get their ultimate approbation all from this—they do what they are meant to do. The Bible as a work of God is vindicated by the same law. It is a divine book because it is perfectly effective for what God intended. And this in the orbit of cosmic efficiency comes back to the axiomatic converse of that statement—what the Bible suffices for is just what God intended.

## V

## THE COMPILATION OF THE BOOK

GOD chose the materials that make up the Bible. By what standards of judgment did He prefer the contents thus preserved above the mass of now unknown manuscript which in the age-long process of compilation He must have discarded? No just human rating of the book in its entirety or in its several parts is possible without some appreciation at least of the viewpoint from which God, as we may say, edited it. Definite reasons must have led to the use of each particular document accepted; it is impossible to suppose that for such a result ancient writings were poured at random into a collection of unstudied miscellany. Is it possible then to infer from the pages of Scripture why God took for His perpetual library of sacred things just the subject matter which to-day is found in it?

This at all events may be stated with assurance—that God's reasons in these premises must all refer to the objects for which by His providence the book was intended. Among these objects, however, one minor factor may be supposed to have reacted negatively on many a possible choice. A Bible which was to serve as a religious handbook for the general host of men, must be

saved from too great bulk. Encyclopædic tomes are studied in libraries by professional scholars; a book for everybody to read at home must be a small and condensed volume. What the Bible might have been in size is suggested by the later Jewish Talmuds. Produced in a garrulous age of dogmatism when Hebrew rabbis talked lifetimes away in vain debate over paltry casuistries, the Talmuds grew to ponderous proportions, over which none but a few plodding specialists in any generation have ever achieved even a half-understanding mastery.

For illumination to the common people all this mammoth Talmudic literature has therefore amounted to nothing from its beginning until now. An unrestricted Bible would have come to the same useless fate. A Hand to prune it, to cut away thickets of words that would have darkened its rich fruits from the sight of ordinary men, was necessary in order to bestow on the modern world a book which a child may handle unburdened and which every believer can carry whole to his secret place of meditation and prayer. Many instances of economical restraint may be traced in the order of the universe; the comparative brevity of the Bible is one instance more.

However, the Bible is what it is by God's inclusions, not by His exclusions. The vital decisions were the affirmative choices, of course. And naturally the first question to be settled about a Bible writing—or a writing appearing available for the Bible—must be whether it conspires with

the book's first purpose. What is that purpose? Venturing to think God's thoughts after Him, the Bible is intended above all else to persuade men that they can have and ought to have fellowship with God. No composition of any human pen therefore could be suitable to form a part of the divine Scriptures if it did not tend to this fundamental conviction. Whatever author gains the honour of appearing among the producers of the Bible must, like all others who please God, "believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." It must moreover be a belief on experience—experience of a man's own, keen enough and clear enough to make him eager to help others to realize the same practical faith. Such were in fact the building stones out of which inspiration erected the imposing and time-defying structure of God's supreme book.

To be sure, the God-consciousness of some of the authors whose work is preserved in our Bible does not seem as clear and spiritually pure as this definition would appear to require. The writer of Esther, for example, was a person so little accustomed to a pious expression of his thoughts that he wrote his whole story without even the mention of God—a circumstance which has led certain strict conservative scholars to question whether the production ever possessed any inspiration at all. Yet a study of its atmosphere rather than its text exposes qualities in the rehearsal of Queen Esther's heroism which leave but small difficulty in understanding why this brief history was chosen

by the Spirit of inspiration to be bound up in the Bible volume. Possibly, indeed, such a section as this was brought into the compass of Scripture with a sympathetic thought for men who find it hard to get deeper in their talk than a few oblique hints at the religious faith which they carry hidden in their hearts. However that may be, though, it is at least evident that in his heart of hearts the author of Esther was one worshipping the God who, as Lowell says, stands "within the shadows keeping watch above His own." He was a real, even if unconfessed, man of faith.

It was, then, with the diffident restraint that usually characterizes men of his temperament, but with a faith that would not let him be wholly silent, that this now nameless historian used his pen on a record by which he hoped he could nerve men and women to depend on the sureness of God even in the darkest of adversities—and live up to their best sense of duty no matter what dangers threatened. He had too a clairvoyant persuasion that "every man's life is a plan of God"—that nobody is born into the world "whose work is not born with him"—and he put that consecrating idea into words that youth at least will not forget: "Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Should not then the everyday modern Christian, to whom such clear confidence in the providential ordering of man's life is vastly rich in both comfort and stimulus, give thanks that the Spirit of God never established any arbitrary rule requiring God's name

to appear in each separate contribution to Scripture. That would have left out Esther entirely. What is requisite everywhere is a message that points and leads to God. And that Esther surely has despite its secular-sounding text.

More dubious under this criterion is the right of the Song of Solomon to be reckoned among the sacred writings of true religion. It does contain once the divine Name. But there is in it far less consciousness of living and moving beneath the eye of God than in the heroic romance of the Persian queen. Besides, the "song" (which is really a drama) has suffered in repute from the meddling of doctrinaires who have foolishly tried to save it as canonical by pretending that it is something which it never was or could be. Not content to let its literary character stand as the Holy Spirit left it, these meddlers have tried to veneer the drama with a fictitious interpretation expected to make it look religious. By fantastic allegorizing they would exhibit it as a picture of the love of Christ and His Church—a violent manipulation without a shred of reason in the poem itself but alleged to be necessary in order to make its tone sanctimonious enough to accord with an inspired Bible. As if men better than the Spirit know what does accord with an inspired Bible!

From such means of commending it to the respect of the Bible's friends, the Song of Solomon has in truth suffered ten times more than it profited. Many readers have instinctively assumed that a piece of literature which, as it

seemed, could not be vindicated for religious use except by distortions obnoxious to common sense, must be of small consequence, if not quite out of place, in a book drawing its credentials from God. But their verdict might have been very different if reason for its appearing within the canon had been sought in its own inherent character rather than in an artificial halo invented to sanctify it.

Really responsible scholarship reports instead that the Song of Solomon is in fact a delicately wrought idyll glorifying stainless fidelity in romantic love between woman and man. Under an oriental exuberance of imagery obscure to western understanding, patient study traces the story of a country maiden stolen from her shepherd swain and carried away to the king's harem, where in the simplicity of a pure and steadfast heart she repulses royal blandishments until in sheer honour to her loyalty the king restores her to her rustic lover, from whom the allegiance of her heart had never a moment wavered. If only the people of God had kept a just sense of the sacredness with which the Creator invested the sex facts of life when "male and female created he them," it is scarcely possible that surprise would greet the suggestion that a love drama—a drama of true love—held a central place in the written word of God.

It is humanity's jesting or sensual degradations of love which make such a theme seem strange in such a book. In an elder age and an eastern life, where the sense of the story would be more intelligible to the common mind, the poem may

doubtless have helped many a soul to know the holiness in God's sight of love and marriage. And that assuredly would be leading a man closer to the divine. Let us not then disavow even this strangely mystic "song" as unworthy of the Bible. Possibly the day may come when its recovered meaning will again shed a hallowed light on the unity of those "whom God hath joined together."

It is impossible, however, to prolong in detail the inquiry how each particular element in this composite Bible helps on the single coördinate aim of pointing men to God. The fact which the illustrations just discussed tend to show might be fortified by consecutive citations from every one of the Bible's sixty-six divisions—there is but one aim in the book but that aim is fulfilled in a variety of modes too manifold to count. The Bible has consistency without sameness.

Men are best won to confidence in God by knowledge of what He has been to generations past who served Him. The Bible meets that with its abundant histories, culminating in the history of Him in whom "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Men learn to praise God by examples of praise; how rich the Bible is in that incentive. They are taught to think right about God as they share the thoughts of the right thinkers of the past; the Bible is the ultimate school for that crowning art of the human mind. And there are portions besides to glorify simple common sense.

So it becomes apparent that another of God's guiding principles for selection of the Scriptures is the need of wide variety. Variety is demanded by men's different moods and circumstances; there must be much for the man in joy, but that necessity cannot be permitted to skimp the comfort provided for the man in grief. A provision for the satisfaction of a man's reason as he questions the ways of God is indispensable. But it would be a sadly inadequate Bible which spoke only to reason and had no voice of appeal to a man's emotions and no challenge for his will. Optimism and apprehension, daring and caution, conservatism and progressiveness—all these must be balanced against one another if the moral movement of mankind is kept in equilibrium. And true to every need the Bible supplies all these elements in an absolute wealth of variousness. May God be praised again for His "divers manners."

## VI

## THE TRUTH OF THE MESSAGE

SURER than all else in the Christian's conviction concerning the Bible is his faith that the Bible is true. An undeniable spiritual instinct would demand that, even if the inferences of reason did not. It is the same instinct which breaks to the surface so emphatically in Paul's abrupt exclamation: "Yea, let God be found true and every man a liar." Whoever or whatever else is false in the universe, God must not be; the universe dissolves at the very imagination of a truthless Creator. And by necessity if the God of truth prepares for mankind a book revealing His ways and will, that too must be a book of truth.

The very soundness of this confidence in Scripture truth may, however, betray the unconsidering and superficial to unwarranted conclusions. So-called plain thinking on supposedly obvious topics often speeds too fast to fixed opinions. Truth seems an idea of such clarity that few perhaps think of its requiring analysis in order to discriminate between characters and forms of truth. In the story of world events offered by the daily paper there is commonly no question involved but

the simple test: Did what is told here happen as it is here related or did it not? Even in the current press, however, when editor or correspondent assumes to estimate the motives and delineate the influence of a statesman, a party or a movement, the fidelity of the report depends on something deeper than the literal precision of the facts asserted. The facts may all be actual and yet the interpretation of them totally astray; either because all the elements of the case have not been brought into view or because the commentator is deficient in understanding of what he does see.

In a still deeper stratum of thought, where men deal with the philosophy of life, mere accuracy of statement is less sufficient to convey truth. False teachers in economics, sociology or religion are but seldom liars; in the average case they tell facts quite indisputably. But they tell the facts in wrong relations, and expose their inherent falsity when facts which do not suit their theories they willfully pass by. In all the greater interests of human life it takes something better than a correct reporter to speak the truth; only a man having (according to Bible language) "truth in the inward parts"—a man saturated with love of truthfulness—is capable of marshalling into his view and into the view of other men that wholeness of reality which alone is worthy to be called in any large sense the truth.

If thus difficult and unusual is the comprehension of the whole truth in the graver of humanity's own concerns, how much more difficult must it be

to attain a truthful grasp of the far profounder things that have to do with the mutual concerns of man and God. Whether it is man's responsibility as a self-willing moral creature or his divinely surprising opportunity to help God realize the immortal ideals to which creation is dedicated —whatever the message, warning or summoning, which the word from heaven is designed to convey —this at least is sure in any case, that expression of the thought will overtax the capacity of the brain and soul chosen to be the channel of it. Nevertheless it is such supernal ideas as these that the Bible does express. From this viewpoint the making of a Bible ranks with the most marvellous achievements of omniscient ingenuity. As in nature, so in the realm of grace, the very simplicity of God's solved problems often disguises from us the impossibilities that He has conquered. Did we but look more closely, we should wonder vastly more.

With singular aptness just this may be said of the Bible. God has made it a book of truth—the book of the greatest, sublimest, deepest and broadest truth that the world knows—in spite of the human disqualifications which everywhere must clog the project of revealing infinite realities to finite understanding. His methods have taken account of the obstacles and have overcome them with the same practical directness which the world's best engineers learn from the tutelage of nature. When the resistance of a transmission wire hinders the producer of electric power from

sending a greater current through that one medium, he does not despair of distributing the energy which his dynamos are generating; he parallels the loaded cable with another of equal capacity. And the new wire, with all later fellows strung on the same circuit of distribution, not only carries its own load of power but by induction intensifies the service of every comrade in the task.

It is by means very like this that God sends down to men the vital power of the Spirit which His Bible is effectually devised to carry. Had He used but the one lone wire of any single mind to diffuse to the world His truth, the whole truth could never have been communicated in any religious sufficiency. Not the most capacious human brain escapes restrictions that narrow the receptive faculties of the soul; were God to bestow all spiritual knowledge on some one favoured servant of His, the treasure would inevitably overflow the vessel and run to waste. Still more, the inevitable bent of peculiarity which makes every man his special and individual self, forbids the hope that God's messages could traverse any human intellect without being subject to some personal diffraction in the passage. To use more than one medium is the necessary means of cancelling this factor of human idiosyncrasy.

In revealing His salvation to the world, therefore, God must plan multiple transmission. Not one prophet but many; not a sole and lonely apostle but a varied group; not a single psalmist but a guild of singers; not an outstanding unique

historian but a multitude of chroniclers—by these He made sure of imparting to men the rich fullness of a manifolded Gospel. It is not only ampler in content than any single voice could have conveyed, but it is richer in colour, taking brilliance from every faithful personality who has been divinely used to contribute to it. The many prisms that pass along the light impart to the Bible an alluring variety of hue and tint like to the iridescence by which in nature the dewdrop and rainbow are bejewelled.

Saying all this, we must not forget that in the noonday of this Bible revelation there came One who spake like never man spake or could speak. In this "crystal Christ" there was found and in His voice there was heard, as Lanier said, no "if or yet." And the reverence of the world from that day till now continues to bear witness that His words measured a wholeness of truth such as humanity has seen no other of its teachers able to compass. Age succeeds age, since He lived on earth and left it, and still there is nothing to subtract from His sayings nor anything to add save what echoes their wisdom. Were there no other argument for the supernaturally supreme character which the New Testament ascribes to the Central Person of its story, the circumferential completeness of His preaching—fragmentally reported though it was—would remain in glowing contrast to the fractional emphasis of every other religious leader throughout all time, and would refute every explanation of the difference except the explana-

tion which sets Him higher than all others of earth.

Even in connection with His incomparable life and words, however, the point of argument in this study comes again into convincing view. If Jesus comprehended the complete circled unity of truth as no man might, the four Gospels are yet a graphic demonstration that even among His disciples none obtained from Him anything like an equal catholicity of mind. Those nearest to Him, like ourselves to this day, were tied to personal points of view, from which each took the opinion and estimate of the Master most in accord with his own singularity of temperament or interest.

If but the Synoptic Gospels remained to us we should in this remote day of the Christian epoch be dwelling far too exclusively on the human traits of our Lord and the human elements in His personality. If on the other hand all our knowledge of Jesus were supplied to us by the story which John wrote, the Saviour by this time would have become an almost mystic wraith, of whose fleshly brotherhood with ourselves we should perhaps be in despairing doubt. It is the possession of all four of these differing pictures of the Lord—for happily even the portraits of the synoptists are not absolute duplicates—which, like the duplex vision of a man's two eyes, lifts the figure of Jesus into the roundness of distinct and embodied vitality. Who among us can fail of gratitude that the "providence of the canon" did not leave us depending on but a single biography of our Master? How

poorly we should know Him without the fourfold fullness of the evangel by which the Holy Spirit has bequeathed to us our historic knowledge of Jesus.

From all that has thus been said, it follows that the truth of Bible revelation is reserved for him who searches for it not in a part of the Scriptures but through their whole range. If indeed one persists in confining himself within given portions which seem to chime with some characteristic note of his thinking or experience, it cannot be said that he is deceived. An observer who has viewed some mighty mountain mass from but one favourite outlook has certainly seen the mountain. He may be taken as a true witness to the fact of the mountain's greatness and solidity. But his individual description of it would be an ill guide to depend upon. What could he from his stationary angle tell of the mountain's aspects of grandeur from various points of observation, its compass, its environing features? So the specialist in one or another Bible doctrine as gleaned from a single author or a special passage, may not be said to be lost from truth. But it is not safe to accept him as an expositor of all that the Bible means or all that truth embodies. Not a specialist but a generalizer —one who walks round about Jerusalem to tell all the towers thereof—alone can approximate true Biblical theology.

In fact, to interpret the Bible rightly a student of the Scriptures needs to be a genius in synthesis. When Paul says that faith saves men, he is right.

When James says that men are saved by works, he is right. But neither apart from the other has the truth. It is idle to pretend, as some have done because they misconceive what inspiration implies, that both apostles are saying the same thing under different terms. If they were saying the same thing, there would be no need of having the sayings of both in the Bible. They are both in the Bible because the partial view of each goes to help make a whole view of the facts in the case, as the two conceptions are not contrasted but combined. One mapped one-half of the great mountain peak of salvation; the other mapped the other half. Put the two together and you will know the whole noble country in which both were God-glorifying explorers.

So Paul's conception of God's stern sovereignty and John's passionate vision of God's overflowing love afford but fragmental notions of God when held apart. United they begin to unfold the true measure of the divine Greatness. The difference is not disputatious but complementary and corroborative. Something of the same thing requires to be said of the Old Testament revelation of a God concerned to use one special nation for special purposes in His providence and the New Testament revelation of a God loving all nations with an impartial Fatherhood. It is the way of spiritual poverty to reject one of those thoughts—special or universal providence—and take the other. Let us instead be rich by believing both. And the pessimism of Ecclesiastes—if a man fed on that

alone he would never be able to lift his voice in any sort of praise to God. Yet when one has given over his whole reckless soul to gayety and irresponsibility, then Ecclesiastes is the very salt he needs to keep his life from putrefaction. A pharmacopœia for every spiritual disease is the Bible; a cyclopædia of all spiritual wisdom too. Not less than all of it is sufficient.

Wherefore God had to take care to make the book not only compact enough, as we have said before, but also capacious enough.

## VII

## THE BIBLE'S HUMAN ELEMENT

HOW far is the Bible affected by the human limitations of its writers? Likewise, in what degree has the Bible been limited by undeveloped capacities, either intellectual or spiritual, in those for whom immediately it was written, who were the first to be religiously instructed by it?

We have already taken into account one limitation which the most jealous interpreter of inspired Scripture will scarcely be at pains to disallow. It is in fact a restriction which seems involved necessarily in the very thought of divine revelation. There would be no need of supernatural revealment if the ideas which are thereby communicated to men were not greater in reach and compass than the native measure of the human mind. It is well to recall how vividly that was impressed on the consciousness of the prophet who repeated God's reminder of it: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

It would be incredible to suppose that any form of inspiration could eliminate this disparity. That virtually would be eliminating the difference between the finite and the Infinite. A human being exalted to see all and think all as God sees and

thinks could hardly be counted human thereafter. Certainly no man in the long succession of messengers by whom our Bible came to us can be thought to have enjoyed the inspiration of God in higher form than the Apostle Paul. And he has let us know very plainly that he had no sense of having been elevated thereby to any transcendent level of intelligence. He meekly included himself along with all the fellow-believers to whom he wrote when he said not only, "We know in part," but as well, "We prophesy in part."

Paul in his epistles wrote truth as best he saw it, but he never for a moment imagined that he was furnishing to the Church on earth a transcript complete of the endless counsels of heaven. Only in an after life and in a far diviner atmosphere, "when that which is perfect is come," did he hope to "see face to face" and to "know fully" even as by the all-seeing and unconditioned knowledge of God he had always "been fully known." No, it would not have been the Apostle Paul who would care to dispute the statement that even the inspired Scriptures partake in this present world of the partialness which affects all things done by the hands and through the agency of man.

There follows from this a consequence which cannot be blinked. If, as we have said in a previous study, it has frequently been necessary for the Divine Oversight to accumulate the testimony of two or three or four men in order to complete a round view of truth whereof individually each saw but a half, a third or a quarter, then there

runs with this the inevitable risk that in each component section the respective author may have overemphasized that fractional phase of truth which he peculiarly felt.

Not appreciating all the qualifying facts, he would be almost certain to state his special fact too broadly. Thus in regard to the Old Testament conception of God as the national protector of His chosen Israel (which, as has already been noted, had eventually to be rounded out by the New Testament revelation of God's impartial compassion for all mankind), it is plain that until this complemental truth did dawn on the people of Jehovah they misunderstood very many things about God's will for other nations and therefore in some cases at least misjudged what was just and right in their relations to neighbouring nationalities. Assuredly then it can be considered no matter of wonder if portions of Scripture written during the period when the nation of Israel entertained such circumscribed ideas of God are now discovered to bear evidence of those restricted views, resulting in overstressed sympathy with nationalistic prejudices then current.

Nobody who really believes in God will make any doubt that God was entirely able, in even so primitive and illiberal an epoch, to lay hold on some extraordinary man and illuminate him with all the world vision that thrilled the souls of Paul and John in apostolic days. God can do any miracle that He pleases. But He does even His miracles according to law—the law of progress by

which He steadily presses on from epoch to epoch to fulfill His cosmic projects. Never yet has God been found using a miracle to provide for impatience a quick road to eternal results. And surely He did no such thing in providing for man a Bible. Let us reverently say, He took His time to it.

When therefore the Holy Scriptures began to take form, the Divine Power attempted no sudden "tour de force" which might have created over night a volume of ultimate perfection up to the level of what were to be civilized man's peak attainments in thought and idealism. Had it been such a book into which God put His revelation of Himself, it would have been a useless mystery to the patriarchal ages. Perhaps it would be still a sealed riddle even to our time. A vain human experimenter might have done so futile a thing as that if he had had the power. God knew better. It is not a cabalistic Bible which we have.

The real fact is that our Father in heaven—this too we have already said—was from the first working for His children in each age of history just where they were and as they were. He was imposing on them no cryptograms which would have to be left for some rarer race of wiseacres in unforeseen time ahead to interpret. Like a true Father He sent His messages in language which then and there His sons and daughters might receive understandingly. He spoke to them, that is to say, by men of their own time and their own tongue. A prophet miraculously thrust forward into touch with the ideas and reasonings, the discoveries and

inventions, of some century then veiled in the cloudland of the future, could have said nothing comprehensible to his contemporaries. The prophet had to be a man of his own day. What he said and what he wrote was primarily for the inspiriting, the guidance, the reclamation, of men and women all around him.

Not that any Bible-writer was ever just one in a crowd. Always God's message-bearer has to be somebody a little way ahead. Otherwise he would not know what to call the people forward to. And the divine word is always a call to be moving on. Yet the voice which speaks for God must not be too far in advance if it is to sound loud in the ears of the called. So always there are tones and accents in it but a little less rude and crude than the mass speech of the hour. If the message is put in writing, there are sure to be finger prints of the current generation here and there on the manuscript. An absolutely timeless literary work may or may not be conceivable. But there is at least no such thing in the Bible.

It cannot be denied that from material of this sort, which seems too timely and too popular to be anything but evanescent, it appears an improbable, if not impossible, hope to expect the evolution of a standard religious book on which later ages might rely as a permanent guide to the will and work of God. And so it would be if there were naught but impersonal evolution behind it. But because the design of a foreseeing and choosing heavenly Father is there, the hope is not vain.

No doubt, out of all that the Holy Spirit has prompted men to write in times past for the religious teaching of humanity, the great overplus has been too deeply contaminated with the transient bias of a half-instructed world for any use to be made of it in a perpetuated Bible. But here and there the Omniscient Eye has discovered some mighty document so full of burning vision of spiritual realities, so vibrant with the actual experience of souls in touch with the Soul Divine, that providence could by no means afford to let it disappear from the sacred treasures of religion. What then if, on the surface of so invaluable a witness to things unseen but eternal, there should appear exposed certain blemishes of inadequate or even distorted understanding? Will God cast away all the brilliant wealth of its truth because there cling to it some minor fragments of human imperfection?

Perhaps He must have done so if there had been no other way of setting right the misapprehensions involved. But He had another way. Down the vista of coming days God saw a time when His servants would comprehend more clearly the subtler spiritual facts of which a former age was uncertain. So the divine Editor needed not to discard what was "written aforetime," even though marked by the lacks and insufficiencies of the period. Well He knew that later "men after his own heart" would complete this insufficient truth, and in the perfected Bible its positive testimonies would count for sustenance of faith, while

all its negative defects would be absorbed in the adequacy of the book entire.

Such a method of building up a book of revelation might be judged quite inconsistent with the character of God—whose own perfections invite confidence in the unqualified perfection of all His works—if it were not for our constant observation of the like means by which He trains the race of humanity in all other concerns of life. Everywhere He educates men from smaller to greater by processes which leave more for them to find out than He tells them—more for them to do than He does for them. Not the instantaneous fiat of His own will which makes all things perfect at a stroke, but the patient progress of step by step which leads men to higher knowing and broader seeing and deeper feeling, while the guiding God walks beside them, is His manifest preference for achieving His objects in this world—whatever may be His working plan elsewhere in creation.

In that original home of man which the Bible has taught us to call the Garden of Eden, there were present all the forces which to-day light the lamps and move the enginery of civilization, and God, had He wished, might have begun history with the steam and electricity of a modern metropolis. But He made known to humanity in the morning of its annals no more than the secret of turning the soil and planting the seed; as the Bible expresses it, "Jehovah took the man and put him into the garden to dress it and to keep it." And from that simple start in primitive agriculture

God left the man to climb, with strengths divinely provided but humanly exercised, to the pinnacle of present science, where physically puny humanity controls powers of nature which antiquity never dreamed that the hierarchies of heaven itself might wield.

It surely cannot be deemed ungodlike if for man's spiritual training an analogous progress is traceable in divine revelation. It may be counted sure that in the life of the soul as in the life of the body the Creator would establish man with capital enough to live by from the beginning. The earliest life entitled to be called human had a consciousness of God—turned to God as the earliest flower turned to the sun—and dimly at least appreciated that pleasing God was the secret of all well-being. In primeval time, as always since, God "left not himself without witness." But it was manifestly not His will to show all in one blinding dazzle of illumination. His messages were destined to "grow from more to more." As He had planted in the human soul that inextinguishable instinct which ever prompts mankind to "seek God if haply they might feel after him and find him," so He provided for them the reward of something ever remaining to be learned—which is likewise his reward who seeks God through nature.

Till "the fullness of the time came" the Father even delayed to let shine on men "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And still, after the calendar of men's redemption had brought round the day when

the "very image" of the Father must needs be seen on earth, there remained much yet to be revealed and be learned—things which, as Jesus Himself said, His dearest disciples were not yet prepared to hear. Even with the Bible complete, knowledge was and is not complete. The Spirit of truth, as the Lord Himself promised, even yet leads into truth those who love the truth.

The thought then of progressive revelation need offend no one who is not offended by progressive science. Each is of God—each by the wisdom of Him who knows all is conditioned on and adapted to His faith in humanity's capacity to know more. Likewise let us be sure that one process quite as much as the other is under God's providential guidance, guaranteeing both against frustration or incorrigible deflection. The heavenly Overseer has always taken care that the world had men in it with the spirit of quest desiring to know earthly things. So likewise have there never failed men having the spirit of quest desiring to know heavenly things. Of these latter, in the ages when the Bible was building, came forth the authors of what are now our Scriptures. They sought to know. God met them and told them. Then they wrote and what they wrote God preserved for us. No common men were they; they were great men attaining an ineffable companionship in high regions beyond the ken of the earth-bound. And it was the reality of that spiritual greatness which made them fit to write of God—fit to be the religious benefactors of the world to this day.

## VIII

## THE MIRAGE OF INERRANCY

IT may dismay some to realize that what has just been said about human limitations in the Bible forestalls the possibility of establishing for the book a claim to inerrancy—which by many is considered to be the essential verifying quality inseparable from divine inspiration. In some sections of nearly all Protestant bodies it is a practically unquestioned dogma that if any error of any sort were demonstrably discovered anywhere within the covers of the Holy Bible, the whole book by that fact would be stripped of any rational title to a status of divine authority. Others, a little less positive on this point, say simply that if any portion of the book were found to contain erroneous statements, that portion would have to be excluded from the range of inspired Scripture. And there are many unbelievers who, taking these friends of the Bible at their word, point out what they regard as undeniable errors on certain Bible pages, and by that consideration alone assume that they have set themselves free from every obligation to heed or even respect the volume.

Therefore one who has spoken of deficiencies in the Scriptures which appear to result from the ignorance or incompetence of the times in which they were written, has risked the peril of paining

a host of devout Bible-lovers—or, better said, Bible-trusters. It behooves such a one, then, to hasten to make clear that the power of the Bible —its worth, its right to speak to human souls, its conveyance of the message from God—do not depend on inerrancy and are not vacated when the student of the Scriptures abandons the effort to show that the Bible is a book of no mistakes.

To be sure, it is easy to conceive mistakes which would invalidate the Scriptures—mistakes about God, mistakes about the duty of man toward God, mistakes about the right way of living amid one's fellow men; such errors, if pervading the Bible as a whole and standing unmodified by any later and superseding instruction, would indeed render the book morally untrustworthy and spiritually misleading. But we have already set forth, in part at least, the reasons why evangelical Christianity holds by the faith that in the Bible we have God's great bequeathed guide-book designed to direct the feet of men into the paths of divine fellowship and divine obedience. To that faith it is indeed an indispensable corollary that the guide-book must guide to the true path; any other imputation would "make of none effect the faithfulness of God."

If the Bible is not to be relied on as an agency of what we have defined as its supreme purpose —the consummation of vital intercommunion between man and God; if it will not lead to that consummation the man who comes to it with a hunger for God in his soul—then all too surely

God is not in the book. But if it does by the exhortation of its counsels and the example of its living personalities—especially its chief Personality—show men the way to live for, with and in their divine Lord and Saviour, then by a far greater surety God is in the book. That the latter is the constant and indefeasible fact about the influence of the Bible among mankind, evangelical theology has steadfastly believed from the Reformation onward, and the historic expression of that confidence is the affirmation that with reference to faith and practice the Holy Scriptures offer—not an inerrant but—an infallible standard of spiritual instruction.

On the dictionary page there may appear but a figment of difference between these two adjectives —"infallible" and "inerrant"—and from that viewpoint the attempt to assign them diverse meanings may seem an artificial play with words. But the atmosphere which surrounds the two terms in the field of theological discussion affords full reason for saying that the Bible by no means needs to be inerrant in order to be infallible. The two phrasings do not paint the same picture. When "infallible" is the word used, there rises on one's vision a mighty thought of power and authority radiating from the Bible as a central luminary in the moral sky just as energy radiates from the daily sun in the firmament of heaven. But when one says "inerrant," the suggestion to the mind is rather a picking and paltering over trifles, a persistence about the insignificant—as if

a man perishing with cold should refuse to warm himself at a fire until he had ascertained that no stick longer or shorter than twenty-four inches was burning in the blazing pile. So indeed there are Bible students who bother endlessly about the sticks in the fire-heap—just how this text should be laid on or across that other text—and they never get a flame started that will warm either themselves or anybody else. For many such people it would be a great relief of soul if from their small fussiness they could be delivered into the large knowledge that what signifies for the faith of a Christian is a Bible to be depended on in the whole bulk of its truth—to which inerrancy in mere detail could add not a featherweight of worth.

That this is not a position perilous to the spirit or untenable for the mind, all believers may reassure themselves by remembering that the claim to be without errors of human misinformation is a claim that the Bible never makes for itself. It is true, indeed, that extensive elements in the early histories of the Bible and in the prophets—the major prophets especially—are set down as direct quotations from the mouth of Jehovah. Notable in the materials so sanctioned is the Mosaic law, almost every section of which is introduced by the standardized phrase, "Jehovah spake unto Moses." But there is no hint in history or prophecy of any means other than honest human memory employed to guarantee the Biblical record of Jehovah's words. Indeed, it is possible without irreverence

to affirm that in the case of the most permanently important of those divinely spoken laws—the ten commandments—the transcription into Israel's statute books was not letter-perfect. Memory and record—even though the record is said to have existed for centuries in graven stone—have failed to preserve for us the knowledge of what exactly God said when He spoke out of the clouds of Sinai to the awed Hebrew tribes massed in the plain below.

If this appears startling to any Bible reader, he needs only to compare the twentieth chapter of Exodus with the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy and note the differences between the recital of the ten commandments in those two passages. It is quite true that the differences are of no consequence as relates to the moral force of the decalogue; the reader gets from one passage just as well as from the other the will of God for the conduct of life. But the point here is that the conveyance of that eternal truth is accomplished without any changeless crystallization of the words used.

The main divergencies, as any student may see for himself, are in the fourth commandment. Exodus tells that God gave as a reason for the sacredness of the Sabbath His own rest after the completion of creation, and the form of statement indicates that it had already been a hallowed day as long as the world had stood. Deuteronomy presents the Sabbath institution as a memorial newly established to keep the Israelites reminded of their

deliverance from Egypt. It may be held that God named both reasons. But that, if it is considered to be really probable, would only reëmphasize the point which is here being stressed, for in that event neither record affords an exact transcript. The ten commandments are infallible without doubt—all the consent of moral thinking throughout the ages testifies to that. But the form in which we have them cannot possibly be shown to be inerrant.

The dogmatic faith of the Church has always, and the personal faith of the Christian has nearly as invariably, attributed to the words of Jesus Christ a divine authority no less than the formula, "Thus saith Jehovah," imparts to those passages to which it is attached in the Old Testament. Yet here the test of inerrancy fails even more obviously than in the older writings. There has heretofore been discussed the ground for saying that the quadruple story of the Gospels which the Holy Spirit has provided in our Bible affords the later world a much more realistic appreciation of the great soul of Jesus Christ than any single biography could have furnished. But it is equally true (though minutely less important in comparison) that these four accounts, when set side by side, compel us to realize that we shall never know the exact terms in which the Lord put some of His most graphic sayings nor the precise circumstances surrounding some of the greatest moments of His experience in this world.

Take for example His beatitudes. Did He say, "Blessed are ye poor," or did He say, "Blessed

are the poor in spirit"? Luke repeats the utterance in the first form; Matthew in the second. Sometimes with such various readings the student may say that the difference makes no difference; the idea conveyed is the same under either form. But here there is contrast not only of words but of sense. We should be able to tell very much more than we do now about the attitude of Jesus toward the economic conditions of life if we could be sure whether when He spoke of blessed poverty He was thinking of the lack of worldly goods or of the absence of religious pride among those whom He delighted to count as His friends.

So likewise is there considerable spread of distinction between what was meant by the Master if He said, "The kingdom of God is among you," and what He meant if He said, "The kingdom of God is within you." The first would give the kingdom a time mark; the second a character mark. It is the latter meaning which men of our day would rather cling to. But till the end of time no man in this world will know surely which was the sense the Lord had in mind. The uncertainty here, however, arises not from varying reports by different witnesses but from the ambiguity of the language in which the saying has been kept for us. Probably the Master's meaning was entirely clear to those who heard Him say this thing in His native Aramaic. But the translation into Greek brought obscurity because the translator blundered into a grammatical usage capable of two constructions. This confusion of

sense, however, could alter little the later Church's apprehension of the character and mission of Jesus; interesting therefore as it would be for us to learn just what Christ did say, who would dare to think that, simply for the satisfaction of our curiosity, the supervising Spirit would concern Himself to prevent or remedy so tiny a flaw in so great a story?

Among those who regard inerrancy as indispensable in an inspired Bible, it is customary, where seeming contradictions appear on the surface of Biblical passages, to try to maintain the principle by "reconciling" these discrepancies. This process consists in working out some theory of the circumstances under which it would be possible for both diverse statements to be literally true. Much skillful conjecture has been spent on this means of justifying the accuracy of the Bible, and it cannot be denied that in numerous instances plausible explanations have been hit on; some of them may actually reconstruct from differing accounts the ampler details of what in fact did happen. But far oftener the adjustment of one account to another is accomplished by surmises so far fetched that no one would think of indulging them if a supposed necessity did not demand the reconciliation at all costs.

No matter how successfully this interweaving of varied stories is carried out, however, it does not improve the case for the advocates of inerrancy. If precise exactitude in details were a required mark of a God-inspired writing, then ob-

viously it would be impossible to regard as inspired the individual writings in which occur paragraphs that need to be thus "reconciled" before they give the right impression. Severally considered, each unit on this assumption must give a wrong impression. And it is to be remembered that most of the sixty-six documents now bound together in our Bible were first put forth in independent form, and their original readers could not have had opportunity to compare them with the other Bible writings with which they are now associated. The supposed clarification to-day pursued so diligently was therefore in the beginning impossible, and readers at that time were certainly led into opinions of fact which present-day reconcilers would consider erroneous, because the data from parallel accounts, by which it is claimed that fuller facts are now made apparent, were not then available.

Thus an early Christian who might have in hand only Mark's Gospel would suppose that Jesus restored sight to only one blind man when He passed out of Jericho on His last journey to Jerusalem. Not till the believer read Matthew would he know that there were two blind men there, both of whom were blessed by the healing power of the Christ. And then after he got hold of the Gospel by Luke, he would be entirely uncertain whether the one man or the two men healed had met the Lord when He passed out of Jericho or when He was coming into the town. Similarly four persons who read respectively the four separate accounts of

Peter's tragic denial of the Lord would have in mind four quite different groups of incidents. The best reconciling which the inerrancy dogmatists can do with this case is to infer that Peter actually denied the Lord seven times—which disagrees with what the Lord predicted and is contrary to the impression which any one of the evangelists conveys by his individual story.

Plainly, records that in minute matters of circumstance are brought into accord only by rashly adventurous guessing—which, to say the least, is not itself inerrant—cannot depend for their value on that kind of microscopic precision which inerrancy calls for. If God had ever intended to stake the reputation or the authority of the Bible on a superhuman accuracy in minor and incidental facts, He would certainly have taken care to make that extraordinary exactness an unmistakable phenomenon. There is no evidential value for inspiration to be drawn from the sort of inerrancy which to a cursory reader is so little manifest that he thinks he sees quite the opposite—the same kind of harmless inexactitude that he would expect in all story-telling and history-writing by average honest men. But there is on the other hand a vast gain for faith and immense rest for troubled minds when the simple truth is recognized that in providing for an inspired book of religion the inspiring Spirit saw no need of working the gigantic miracle which would have made ordinary fallible men omniscient in minutiæ. Who conceivably could be strengthened in faith toward the Lord

Christ by knowing surely whether it was at the east gate or the west gate of Jericho that Bartimæus was roused to hope by the electric word, "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by"?

Another imagination which has been invoked by the same dogma is still more futile—the hypothesis that although there are apparently irreconcilable discrepancies in the Holy Scriptures as we now possess them, there were no mistakes and no contradictions in the original manuscripts as the Bible authors penned them. All errors that can be traced in to-day's Bible have resulted, according to this theory, from the blunders of copyists and translators through whose hands the book came down to us. It is passing strange that the architects of this conception cannot see that it is bound in the very nature of the case to fall and bury them in its ruins. If the book by which God conveys His law and Gospel to mankind must be historically inerrant in order to be religiously infallible, then on the hypothesis here outlined the revelation of God perished from the earth ages ago—being destroyed by the incompetence of those who transcribed it from one manuscript to another and rendered it out of its original languages into the tongues of the nations.

The logic of this is that we to-day have no Bible at all to which any divine authority can be attributed. Who then was this God who could at the beginning inspire men to write with a miraculous accuracy but could do nothing afterward to control the errant liabilities of those other disciples

of His to whom He left the preservation of the Scriptures? Just on the score of a due respect to the sufficiency of God's omnipotence, it is far more reverent, instead of supposing that inspiration was baffled thus, to believe that God never tried to abolish honest men's fallibilities but was always content to reveal His truth through and by their natural human talents.

There is a great maxim dear to the most just and most enlightened legal minds—a maxim drawn from ancient Rome, the mother of the world's jurisprudence: "The law cares not for trifles." It is a maxim which theology ought to adopt in honour of the heavenly Father, whose infinite mind is the native home of law as well as of revelation, and whose love desires for mankind not petty securities within tight-closed corrals but abundant life along the wide ranges of a free universe. "God cares not for trifles." Certainly it is an intellect childishly restricted which is able to imagine Him who "upholdeth all things by the word of his power," sitting in the central rulership of the universe with concern in His thought about the possibility that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John would not get it straight whether Peter denied his Lord to two or only to one of the high priest's serving maids.

But God had charged Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to make known to the world the mighty fact that their Master came into the world to redeem sinners from the curse of sin—and to take care that they did that and to provide that their mes-

sage should never be lost from the hands of God's children who needed that testimony to His love, His vastest powers have been none too great for the eternal God to employ.

In making a Bible God made a book which like all the rest of His works is to be praised for what it is and not for what it is not. Paul was a soul so in touch with God that in this as in countless other things he caught the divine mood entirely. Paul, writing to Timothy his second epistle, included a definition of inspired Scripture which no creed since has ever equalled for either brevity, fullness or clarity. And he dallied with no such negative and speculative claim as "The Scriptures contain no mistakes." He struck for something far more positive and far more vital—something which experience could testify to with the million-fold force of a universal Christian response: "Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable." Yes, "profitable," effective for the religious ends it was designed for. There is the "impregnable rock" for Bible faith. Just as Jesus prescribed that the life of an individual disciple should be judged by its fruits, so is the Bible to be judged. And its fruits are demonstrative.

"No errors"—a man could wrestle with that proposition for a century and not prove it; every logician indeed would warn him beforehand that a universal negative is unprovable. But "profitable"—that he could prove at every Christian hearthstone, at every Christian altar. And there's the true proof of inspiration.

# IX

## EDUCATION AND SYMBOLISM

THINKING of the Bible as a course of education prepared by the Father in heaven for the instruction of His children in the elder days of the race, detracts nothing from the permanent worth of the book, but does help to put a right value on certain passages often considered difficult to interpret. It surprises no one to find text-books for the primary grades of school differing, not only in contents but in pedagogical method, from text-books designed for high school. If then the Bible comprises a long curriculum from primary to high school and beyond, it cannot be thought strange that differences of quality and appeal distinguish portions of the Scriptures belonging to early stages of the world's culture from portions originating in and designed for later days of more enlightenment.

Had this natural and reasonable view of the Bible prevailed in the Christian mind of recent generations, the Church would never have been troubled by the imagination of a conflict between Genesis and geology. Nor would it now be disturbed by assertions that evolution as one of God's working means of production cannot be believed

in without giving the lie to what the Bible says about creation. These needless antitheses have no basis whatever except the totally unfounded notion—the impossible notion, indeed—that this Genesis prologue contains everything that is ever to be told or learned about the beginnings of the material universe, this present earth and the race of mankind. Such a presumption ought to be contradicted instantly by the very scantness of the story. Can three pages of duodecimo print be a compendium of universal origins? It ought to be still more emphatically contradicted by any observation whatever of the divine training of human intelligence.

When, pray tell us, did God ever make to man a gratuitous present of information which man could by any pains search out for himself? When, for that matter, did any wise teacher ever inform a student of what the student could discover by his own investigation? The pedagogy of earth has in this but learned the pedagogy which the Lord God has observed ever since He began to teach Adam in the kindergarten of time. Revelation He has always reserved for those secrets which are by their nature beyond the inquiries of the earthly mind. A blatant skeptic once announced his find of indisputable proof that Jesus could not have been divine—Jesus went away from this world without telling men that they ought to use knives and forks at their meals. The proof in good common sense really runs the other way; if He had not been divine, He might have

thought it His mission to introduce knives and forks. Being divine, He was wise enough not to interfere with the slow processes by which the race was working out its own civilization. That was a minor matter in which the world could save itself without a heavenly intervention. Christ rendered His service on a plane that men could never reach without Him.

The same economy and reserve are in Genesis. Most knowledge could wait till the human mind grew out of babyhood. All the age-long story in the rocks and all the cosmic panorama in the stars would at length come out; men would learn to read and to discern and in good time would know the marvellous truth of science, both geologic and astronomic. Indeed, in the primitive epoch of the Pentateuch how futile it would have been to develop the complete facts of creation for a tribe of just liberated slaves to read and use. What could the hordes gathered before Sinai have made out of a treatise on the flora of the carboniferous age or a discussion of the history of spiral nebulæ? Were the earliest portions of the Bible of a nature like that, it would scarcely be effrontery to say that God could never have had anything to do with such ridiculously displaced literature. Mothers know enough to tell their small children child stories; God, with an untutored child race to instruct, would surely be as wise.

And so indeed He was. He put into Genesis a child story of creation—a story told in pictures and symbols such as children love. But it was a

true story—so true that to this day, when science has fashioned around it a sumptuous setting of golden knowledge, rich, varied, vast, this same brief story shines still like a jewel in the midst of all later discovery, glowingly lovelier than the staid prosings of the investigators, brilliant with the simple poetry of God's pleasure in His own well wrought handiwork. And it tells of the universe all that man needed morally to know before he had learned enough to be his own explorer into the Creator's mysteries.

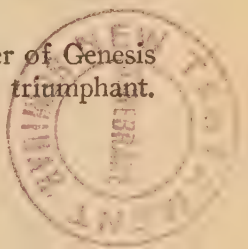
It tells the answer to the great first question of the opening mind of humanity: Who made all this? It tells too the guarantee of the Infinite to the first terrifying skepticism that comes to plague that opening mind; no matter what the cynical look of things may be, "God saw everything that he had made and, behold, it was very good." Out of Genesis its peasant readers even learned something of that divine combination of power and patience which is yet the wonder of those who seek to know the ways of the Lord—able with His power to accomplish all at a word, yet willing to build up His creation by the patient addition of one to one, even as a schoolboy adds up a tedious sum.

The Genesis manuscript alone was therefore enough to let a man know that he was in God's world and that he himself bore marks of relationship to God that set him apart from all living creatures by whom he found himself surrounded. That was not sufficient to make him a scientist

but it amply sufficed to make him a worshipper—which in this Bible introduction was certainly the guiding object of inspiration. And the wonder of Genesis—the sheer, open fact which a denier of inspiration may struggle long to account for in any way consistent with his denial—is that these primeval chapters, innocent of even a suspicion of modern science, to-day commingle freely with all which that science has taught about the constitution of man and the universe and lose no dignity nor suffer any stultification in the contact.

A cosmology now holds sway over men's thought totally different from that which prevailed when Genesis was put into the Bible; a new survey of creation has substituted uncounted millions of years for this story's naive six days; all things have been reclassified and realigned in the natural world; and yet in the simplicity of a great insight the Mosaic account of creation stands up to command the assent of mankind to its two pinnacle affirmations: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and at the end of the work for the crown of the labour He "created man in his own image" and "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul." Some science may indeed doubt that, but the world believes it. And naught but divine inspiration could triumph over the changes of centuries like that. God taught His earliest children truth, and truth it still abides.

The vindication of the third chapter of Genesis—the story of man's fall—is equally triumphant.



The only pity is that some of the Bible's stanchest champions are unaware of the victory and consider that there was a great defeat suffered when the ancient account of the fall of man met the latter-day conception of social as well as organic evolution. To admit this, however, is naturalizing in the Church an ignorance of moral philosophy which may possibly be excusable among scientists but is certainly not befitting to theologians. It is said that evolution makes it foolishness to talk of the fall of man. On the contrary evolution may be fairly said to confirm the fall of man. The only thing that may have been invalidated by the impact of evolution on the Bible at this point is the name which the Church has given to the tragedy of Adam's sin—the "fall." And that's no loss, for the Bible never uses any such term about the transgression in Eden, and the Church would better forget it.

Wherever the two creation chapters of Genesis made any man realize his obligation to God as Creator and Preserver, the next question inevitable must have been why it was so hard to live up to that obligation. Why was a man always sinning? There arose another problem that man could never work out for himself. So the inspiring Spirit prepared the third chapter to give answer—a primary answer indeed but an everlasting one—to that question. By a tale so real to the experience of humanity that its incidents might have been duplicated a thousand times in the substance of the situation, it was shown that God

leaves it to man to make his own decision whether in this world he will obey or rebel. Until man realizes, however, that this is a choice for him to make, he is not a moral creature; in the graphic language of this record, he knows neither good nor evil.

Evolution agrees thoroughly that from such infantile innocency—the irresponsibility of the morally neutral animal—man somewhere passed into the morally responsible realm where conscience distinguishes the right from the wrong and affirms the duty to do right. It cannot guess, though, where that momentous change occurred or how. Genesis tells. God laid on humanity a test to see if humanity would take life or death —obedience necessarily being life when the commands to be obeyed were the laws of the Ruler of the universe. But the tragedy was that humanity chose death—to wit, disobedience. That was the "fall." Yet even then man was at the door of a greater life—beginning an evolution to better things. God said so then and there. That "serpent" of sin that had wrought all the evil of this terrible drama was yet to be crushed by the struggling descendants of erring Eve—especially by One destined to be stronger at the last than the "strong man" of wickedness.

The ancient sinner who read that chapter undoubtedly learned from it what sin was. He learned why its hold on his heart gripped so unshakably. But far better, he understood that it was worth his while to fight for freedom because

God had foretold the destruction of the power of sin. Could human genius without a divine prompting have written so divinely adequate a word for just that page of immortal counsel at just that crisis in the spiritual education of mankind? No; it would be little risk to stake the whole case for the reality of Bible inspiration on that Eden story—provided always, however, that the spiritual light shining from it is what is thought of, and that contentious dispute whether the story is to be called history or allegory is recognized as unbecoming among those who alike attribute its conception to God. The narrative may in reality be either the one or the other without the need of deciding which—the important thing is that it is certainly the truth.

The difficulty felt by so many modern Christians in accepting allegory as an inspired vehicle of God's truth is strictly an occidental difficulty. No oriental would feel it. It is a hindrance imposed on faith by the unimaginative matter-of-factness that is more or less a characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon mind everywhere and especially of that strain in Anglo-Saxondom which draws inheritance from the rigid and literal Puritans. To them the exercise of mental invention to create a tale of what never happened on sea or land was a willful excursion into the realm of that evil one who was a liar from the beginning. Of course, they could not dream of such piece of wicked impertinence existing within the covers of the Bible.

But happily in regard to secular literature even

the strictest of Puritans in our day appreciate the possibility that fiction, produced by an artist capable of broadly depicting living human types in the actors of his plot, may draw a picture really more true to life than any isolated "fact story" of a few real individuals. Fiction can mass its characters under the author's generalship for a far more telling effect. And as for the realism of the result, there are the soundest reasons for saying that a student will learn more of the actual life of England in the time of Richard the Lion-Heart from the imaginative story of "Ivanhoe" than from any extant history of that period.

Moreover, it is by no means unusual for fictional stories to bring about irresistible moral arousement among a people who have woefully long dallied with public evils. Did not Dickens's "Oliver Twist" count powerfully to ameliorate the horrors of English workhouses; his "Nicholas Nickleby" to improve the treatment of English schoolboys? And would anybody deny that Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was a mighty agency toward the emancipation of American slaves? Is it possible then for the Christian, who must believe that the good works of the world are never wrought in the absence of God, to reject the art of fiction as an unworthy instrument for God to employ in the hands of an author who has "let his soul for truth's sake go abroad"? And from that standpoint what hindrance can forbid him to step over to the scarcely more venturesome thought that God might (did

He but choose) inspire works of fiction for His great standard volume of world religion?

The suggestion that the books named for Daniel and Jonah are not perhaps historical has awakened embittered commotion at various times in the Church of Christ because the considerations just proposed have not been common to the thought of contemporary Christians. The dry and flat formula, "The Bible is truth; anything else than literal history is a lie; therefore there can be nothing but literal history in the Bible," has been too hastily clamped down on the discussion. There is more than that to say. The alternative to strict history is not a "pack of lies" but honest historical fiction —a form of the highest literary honour to-day and a type of writing esteemed in nearly all ages for the lofty genius required to lift it to success.

If a prophet of Israel, at some time later than the epoch at which Jonah or Daniel flourished, was persuaded that he could write for his people a message associated with the famous name of one or the other of these men, which by reason of that association would attract a larger reading, is there anybody who will maintain that it was a wicked and deceitful intent? None certainly of that time who read the message would be deceived by it; its fictional character would be understood as readily as Americans understand that "Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker," for example, is not a historical memoir of George Washington. But the great name of a remembered hero would give an appeal to the book and more would read, heed and medi-

tate. And the vividness of romance then as today would intensify the impression conveyed.

Then "who hath known the mind of the Lord that he should instruct him" that historical novels, no matter how full of the great and abiding ideas of religion, must never be admitted to the canon of Scriptures? Who presents himself so to inform the Bible's infinite Compiler? There are crystal-clear spiritual elements in both Jonah and Daniel which, as well as human judgment may guess, a book of divine things could not omit without loss. There is Jonah's moving exposition of God's universal love—remarkable precursor of the supreme note of the Christian Gospel. Daniel too has ideals of fidelity to conscience which expand the conscientious soul with the most heroic motives, whether those ideals are drawn from the great mind that penned the book or from great characters there commemorated who suffered heroically in the flesh. God needed both those writings. Should a question of mere literary form rule them out?

To say these things is not to make argument either for or against the historicity of the two productions thus named. It is an argument that if they were fictional, they would still have just as good title to the rating of inspired documents. And it may be added that not their miracles but their failure to fit into any known historical situation is the obstacle which prevents so many Bible students from classifying them with history. The highest living authority who holds to Daniel as a

historical record seems to admit that such a position can be preserved for it only by supposing that the Darius who cast Daniel into the lions' den was a local proconsul ruling temporarily in behalf of the conquering Cyrus over the city and district of Babylon alone. Yet the lordly manner in which Darius at the end of the chapter wrote to "all the peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth" sounds very little as if he were aware of having the mighty Cyrus or any other potentate as overlord.

Happily, however, there is one point where occidental and oriental believers are able to join in equal recognition of the use of symbolic fiction in the Bible. That luminous meeting ground is the parables of Jesus. There may have been a time when certain Bible-readers concerned themselves to speculate where and when the prodigal son and his father lived and to what far country the former wandered away. But that is long past now. It satisfies all of us, conservatives and liberals, that these forever memorable figures lived in the picturesque mind of Jesus Christ, and from thence they issued into an undying reality—more actual to-day in the immortality of their story setting than all the princes and emperors who ever reigned on the thrones of all the world. There may or there may not have been a man in history who sold all that he had in order to buy a pearl of great price. But there is such a man now; he has lived from the day that Jesus Christ named him. If any man says that a piece of imagination can never

be inspired enough for a place in the Bible, the mere mention of the parables of Jesus is all the answer needful.

Then there is another realm of symbolism in the Scriptures which all schools of Bible students would be equally loath to deny. Surely there are none to maintain that the Bible's descriptions of the architecture and occupations of heaven are literal forecasts of the joys which await the redeemed in the immortal life. How poor would be a heavenly city which could be described in guide-book fashion within the compass of an earth-born and earth-bound language. All our tongues are weighted down with leaden words that have all been necessarily cast in physical moulds. For things that exist in spiritual actuality independent of the familiar forms of matter we have slight imagination and no vocabulary. God's book cannot tell us more than our pens and tongues can say. He speaks perforce of golden streets and jewelled walls and rivers of the water of life. There are no exacter words. But we shall none of us feel cheated if we find none of these things when God brings us to that "place of his abode." If the gold and precious stones are not there, it will be plain to us that they served on earth well and truthfully as symbols of glories far beyond our fleshly ken. And we shall be thankful to God that He did put symbols into His book.

Meanwhile, here in the present life, let us try to do the Bible the constant justice of remembering the picturesqueness of the oriental mind, and

determinedly resist our tendency to interpret the book—wholly of oriental origin—as if it had been produced by Americans in our own pragmatic and factual age. Were it not so solemn a folly perpetrated in premises of such profound seriousness, it would be grotesque to see the Yankee all-business intellect analyzing the delicate dream-fabrics of eastern imagery with the same literalness that it handles a column of market reports. No doubt there have at times risen even in the west poetizers who, if allowed to go on unhindered, would have dissipated the meat of the Lord Christ's teachings into an ethereal ambrosia quite useless for "human nature's daily food." And, of course, we cannot endure to have Christ vapourized into misty fancy. But far oftener the mischief has been done in quite the opposite way when ideals that were meant to lift souls into the pure air of high heaven have been chained down to pace the earth by a profitless and deceiving road of unimaginative ritual.

This is what in the worship of a large part of the Church has totally ruined the great spiritual significance of those two wonderful metaphors, "This is my body" and "This is my blood," and in the practical Christian life has reduced to an idle, prating folly the Lord's canny and pungent proverb: "Give to every one who asketh thee." It is a sorry blunder, of course, to turn a literal word of Scripture into a figure of speech. But it is a blunder equally ill and much more frequent to take a proverb, an epigram, a symbol, a picture phrase, a sparkling adventure in poetic fancy, and

treat it like a formula in geometry or a paragraph of directions from a mail order catalogue. Before an occidental reads this oriental book, he ought to offer a specially humble and fervent prayer for the resurrection and sanctifying of all the poetic imagination latent in him. And especially should he beware, if he does not find the petition abundantly answered as he traverses prior parts of Scripture, of invading the book of the Revelation. Only a poet is fit to read the Bible's final writing.

## X

## THE MULTIPLEXITY OF DOCTRINE

THE demand for an inerrant Bible, as we have said, is an artificial stipulation which men would impose on the Spirit who has inspired the Scriptures but which gets no recognition whatever within the Scriptures themselves. The Bible is nowhere a self-conscious book, and only once does there come to the surface anything which can be deemed an inspired definition of inspiration—the verses 2 Timothy 3: 16, 17, which on an earlier page have already been referred to: "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

It is indeed sometimes alleged that this wording of this passage—the translation of the American revisers—has been weakened from the strong sense of the King James version; some have even said that it was purposely weakened. The accusation is idle, because the language of the revision is just as inclusive and emphatic as the terms of the old version. Nevertheless, in order that the full force of the earlier rendering may be before the eyes of

those who prefer it, let that also be repeated: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Here then is the Bible's standard description of its own qualities, and here surely, if from the Bible viewpoint a preternatural exactness was essential to inspired literature, there would have been some tangible hint of that characteristic. Instead the outlook of the apostle—himself an undoubted agent of divine inspiration—was entirely in another direction. Paul had his eyes on the moral dynamic of the book—its spiritual vitality. That dynamic he had himself felt in the deepest impulses of his own ministry. He had seen its efficiency demonstrated by the consecration and holiness of many fellow Christians who loved the book and lived by it. On both accounts he was so convinced of the divine power flowing out from the Holy Scriptures that he felt no need to seek other grounds for commending it to the confidence of men. Had some one suggested to him that the written word of God might be further attested by asserting that, even in its secular allusions, it was clear from the ordinary misunderstandings and blunders of humanity, he would have been scarcely interested even if he had believed the claim to be correct. He knew so many other things about the Bible infinitely more significant.

How then does it come that Protestantism at

large has laid so tremendous a weight on merely verbal and factual inerrancy in the Bible? Why does a dogma that is invisible in the Bible itself bulk so large in the orthodox defense of the Bible? The explanation is to be found in religious anxieties which the Protestant mind shares with the Roman Catholic mind but which it seeks to intrench in a much different refuge. The instinct of each—probably it would not be too much to say, the universal instinct of men—is for certainty in religion. On so measureless and so profound an interest people feel they cannot afford to endure the least doubtful hazard; they must know. The proverb which bids men be sure they are right before they go ahead, is not sufficient for this case; in living life, a man has to go ahead whether he is ready or not; he cannot wait until he has reasoned through the case. Therefore if religion has any help for him at all, he expects it to speak at once and decisively. He will be content with nothing misty and fluctuating; he wants positive and undisputed surety.

The Roman believer is persuaded that he has just this certainty to answer all his questions. What the priest says, repeating what the pope says, is his reliance; pope and priest claim to know the exact truth about religion, and whatever they may tell him he receives as the end of all controversy—the supreme decision which forbids further query. It is an easy disposal of doubt's inveterate uneasiness. Yet the Protestant Christian rightly feels all this an incredible supposition—that perfect

knowledge of every Christian doctrine should be given solely to one old man shut away in the palace prison of the Vatican, and that the reading and thinking and praying of all other good men in all the world should count for nothing at all in comparison or contrast with the pope's ipse dixit. It is quite too much for a free soul to accept. Still the Protestant too wants that same kind of certainty. Where shall he find it? Away from the pope and from all other seers and preachers and saints as well—from every and any voice of man—he turns to the unchanging record and testimony of the Bible. "Here is God's word," he says; "I rest here."

It is the best of all resting places undoubtedly. We have already borne witness to the faith that no living soul who truly relies on Holy Scripture as his "man of counsel" will fail to please God or miss meeting the Saviour. But it is another question entirely whether the desire of the heavenly Father is, by means of either pope or Bible, to eliminate diversities of faith from among His disciples—to bring them all into one uniform line of thinking, one single consensus of theology.

To say as much as this will, of course, seem to many like denying an axiom of mathematics. It is quite as likely to be a Protestant as a Catholic who will argue: "It stands to reason that there is only one truth about any subject. Whatever opinion men may have on that subject which does not coincide with that one truth must necessarily be a wrong opinion. And on such an important

matter as the truth about himself and the human soul it is certain that God would not leave anybody to error. We simply must believe that somewhere He has made it possible for us to find and know the absolute unmistaken facts of religion." All this may be heard said as emphatically in evangelical as in papal circles, with only a final difference about where that indubitable truth is to be found—in the book or in the Church.

But again it must be observed that the adequate conclusion of the whole matter is not quite so simple as everyday home-made logic would induce us to believe. An open-and-shut antithesis between right opinion and wrong opinion may cover the ground for a question of scientific fact (though not always even there), but a question of the eternal things which fill earth and sky and all the life of man may not be so easily measured. It would be a bold proposition indeed to maintain that any thought which comes within the yea-and-nay of one human brain is the whole unabridged truth about any act of God or any responsibility of man. The character and being of God and the salvation of humankind are still vaster themes; on these a fully balanced understanding is even less likely to be achieved inside any single mind in this world.

In another chapter we have studied how the divine Editor in the Bible secured a comprehensive presentation of various elements of Christian faith by collating a variety of views from different authors, and so in a doctrinal symposium, as it were,

drawing a large circle to include each wide and expansive principle of life. By the same token it often requires numerous minds vibrating in a long gamut of opinions to sound out to the world the full chords of God's entire truth. The loftiest note and the lowest in such an instance may seem distressingly out of harmony; dogmatists may proclaim them in hopeless contradiction—and yet in the swelling symphony of God's messages each may be equally needful for the divinest music. Truth is less often this or that than this and that.

If one will but consider the basic obligation of the loyal Christian disciple to take the Bible as it is for what it is, he will certainly be constrained to yield assent to this proposition of a multifarious theology which God purposes to convey through a multifarious Bible. The opposite conception of one single-strand line of doctrine, drawn undeflected and unduplicated from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New, from which only willfulness or blindness can occasion departure—from which any departure whatsoever is necessarily a crazy plunge into mental confusion and moral rebellion—will simply not stand up in the presence of any honest study of the book that God actually made.

In fact, the dogmatist who says that the Bible was intended to teach just the creedal system which his predilections have derived from it and extinguish every other mode of thought, is verging dangerously close to a sacrilege—for he is in effect saying that the Lord attempted something

which He obviously did not succeed in accomplishing. Is not that an impiety? Certainly other modes of thought are not extinguished. They multiply among the Bible's most devoted readers. If an all-prevailing uniformity of belief in the Church were the object in view when the Scriptures were brought into being, it surely could not have been beyond the divine capacity to produce a book immensely better suited to that end. For that result the Bible should have been much less various, much more systematic, much more logical, much more rigid. To multiply a single pattern anywhere, one must see to having an inflexible mould.

Is not then the reverential attitude that which says that since God did not by the Scriptures suppress differences in the religious beliefs of Bible students, He must be supposed to favour rather than deprecate those diversities? If He wanted an unvarying creed and an undiversified polity throughout His Church, there is certainly enough loyalty abroad among His people to secure what the Master wants. Inasmuch then as a perfect sameness is not secured, even where men heartily agree to take the Bible in its unsophisticated simplicity as the only criterion for either creed or polity, it can only be inferred as a practical judgment on the situation that the Lord of the Church is not interested in sameness. Plenty of proof is evident that the Creator loves variety in nature; why not in faith and love and worship and spiritual experience?

There are those who are very sure that the Father above is not satisfied to have His household on earth ruled over by any arrangement which does not include a hierarchy of bishops. On the other hand, there are a multitude of no doubt equally good and faithful souls who are fully persuaded that bishops are an abomination to the Lord and it is a defeat of some eternal good purpose in the universe if anybody rises higher in authority within the Church than the presbyters. And both these parties in all sincerity appeal to the same Scriptures to sustain their mutually exclusive claims. Each side is amazed that the other should think the Bible can be interpreted to such incredible conclusions. In the doctrinal field, similarly, Baptists and Disciples insist that nothing is plainer than that the New Testament prescribes immersion as the only form by which baptism can be baptism. Practically all others of the greater Protestant denominations hold that nothing can be plainer in the records than the fact that no form was prescribed for the rite and several different forms were used in apostolic times as circumstances might happen to make most convenient.

These disputations look tragic except in the light which makes their ponderous earnestness absurd —the realization that the God who planned and brought together the contents of the Bible cannot possibly have cared much about either of these fiercely debated issues or He would have taken effective pains to settle them long ago before they began. Does any Episcopalian really believe that

the Infinite One, if in fact He considered it requisite for His Church on earth to be forever and only under the governance of lord bishops, would not have been able to say so in terms that not even obstinate Presbyterians could dare to gainsay? Or if in truth no disciple of the Master might be considered to be baptized unless he had been covered head and foot with water, and every disciple must needs be so baptized, would not Jesus have spoken the few words required to make the matter plain even to men who do not possess Greek lexicons and are unable to consult the alleged "scholarship of the world"?

The most outstanding wonder of modern Christianity is the amazing spiritual reaction which permits theologians and ecclesiastics to read a book of such broad and swinging freedom, such unstaled and exuberant variety, as the Bible exhibits, and come away gloating over a handful of short, tough tethers twisted out of a verse here and a verse there, by which they propose to tie up men to a few stubby peculiarities claimed to be essential to religion, if not the sum of it. Why don't they take the road to the open heights instead of back to the hitching posts? Was Jesus ever tethered to a hitching post?

Of course, the greatest enrichments of theology have always been attained by the final consent of men to solve such disputes as we have spoken of by merging the truths of both contentions. The patristic Church achieved such a victory when it resolutely refused to accept the dilemma thrust

upon it by those who would pronounce the Master all divine and those who persisted that He should be called only human. The Church took from both pleas and affirmed the great composite faith that He was both human and divine, and so set its seal to the only never-failing doctrine of salvation by "a great High Priest who hath passed through the heavens" and yet "hath been in all points tempted like as we are." By that act of joining what the less understanding would have disjoined, the fathers saved to the Church of Christ the message out of which has gone forth all the evangelical power which it has wielded in any age. Quite similarly in very recent days comprehensive Christian preachers have put an end to centuries of rivalry between Arminianism and Calvinism by proclaiming them in unison as conjoint halves of a single truth. And presently the now current controversy between liberals and conservatives over progressive or static theology will be set at rest by the discovery that the Bible harmoniously includes both.

As fast as there comes a general recognition of the hospitality with which the Bible entertains together many varied ideas that the creeds put in opposition, there must follow a revision of what is understood by designating the Scriptures as a "standard of doctrine." The idea which now prevails would set up the sacred book as a sort of defining dictionary from which the only allowable sense for each doctrine in a Christian's creed might be drawn with an authority strong enough

to settle and end all discussion. As we have seen, the book is in reality ill adapted for that kind of thing, and the only rational conclusion is that it was never intended for it.

Yet the Bible is none the less a "standard of doctrine"—but rather in the way of a touchstone than as a measuring stick. It can't be pretended that the Bible contains all the truth in the universe, even about religious matters. But it does contain a great copious sample of the truth out of God's deepest and most eternal vein, and it serves and will always serve to judge the genuineness of whatever else in man's philosophizing and in man's experience may turn up in the guise of claimed-to-be wisdom. Let it all be brought in and compared; if it agrees with the fiber, texture, structure, of the Bible's highest and final teachings, let it be called honest goods. But if it disagrees, then out with the stuff; it is but shoddy after all.

Moreover, the Bible stands impregnable as reminder and indeed as demonstration that truth has an existence, an objective existence, all its own. Constantly through the ages the temptation has returned on men to speculate with the suspicion that the only reason for calling anything true is the circumstance that people have somehow come to imagine it true. The natural sequence is the suggestion that morals and justice likewise derive from the same kind of human tradition and consent. But men who read the Bible have the best defense against that temptation. Through the clear eyes of Scripture writers the Christian sees the Throne

set eternally in the midst of the universe and knows that truth and right issue forth from the ultimate source of all reality—the pledge of every basic fact—the infinite being of God.

With this assurance the journey becomes safe which so many private believers and so many accredited theologians as well fear to venture on. The greatest practical defect of the theologies which seminaries and pulpits promulgate is the fear manifest in all of them to put the weight on Christian experience which the Bible puts on it. The invariable answer to every appeal for more stress on the manner in which the Scriptures are validated by the spiritual response of those that read them, is a warning that any such emphasis on the reactions of individual believers will thrust the Church into a chaos of as many different theologies as it has Bible-reading members. But the response betrays a fear that the Bible confounds openly. Do the objectors imagine that the Bible itself is to be dissolved into an airy phantom compounded of the impressions that form and reform as its students turn its pages? Let them dismiss their apprehension. The Bible is a solid not so easily dissolved. The Bible remains as immovable as its God, and ten thousand years hence, if the world endures so long, it will mark the unshaken foundations of righteousness as clearly as to-day. And men will lay out their lives from the base-line of its unchanged data on how to serve their Maker and their fellow men.

But all this should not obscure the one means

by which the Bible is able to assert any governing power over any man's actual living conduct—the one and only means also by which any man is convinced that it brings him a trustworthy message from his Maker. It is the same secret of the sway of the Holy Scriptures over men in Church and in world which will still explain the book's vitality when that ten thousand years to come have been absorbed in history. This secret is the mystic fact, which numberless generations and all sorts and conditions of Christians have found realistic beyond all telling, that when one with earnest mind reads the Bible, something within begins soon to say, "That's true, and that means me." And that fact is matched and clinched by the other certainty to which can be brought the testimony of multitudes whom no man can number—the testimony that when a man with good faith takes up these promises and commands which so surely mean him, and seeks to live by them, he soon returns saying, "I have tried these things out, and they come true; in experience they prove themselves completely."

Men obey the Bible because it imperiously calls to what is deepest in the consciousness—even in the sub-consciousness—of their souls. A man reads, "The Lord is my shepherd," and he knows he needs a shepherd, and he trusts the Lord as a shepherd, and soon his neighbours hear him singing, "I shall not want." And all this is because in very deed the Spirit of God dwells in the book. It is not only that the Spirit once inspired the

Bible. To-day as ever He—in the present tense—inspires it. And it is He who, as Christians read it, allots to each man his portion. No man has quite a whole Bible for his own. He is richest who has most of it, but no one is poor who has any. The Spirit gives each Christian his part, and as the man's soul grows, he is let into a larger and richer holding. So each gets his own Bible not because a council decreed it authoritative nor because a Church has demanded that men call it infallible, but because he can tell what it has done for him and what it has made him do for God.

This interpretation of the Scriptures by and through the life tests applied by the individual Christian soul is the more appropriate to their character and contents because they are themselves in so very large part the records of individual experience in loving God, trusting God, doing His will and enjoying the fullness of His providence and redemption. Extensive portions of the Bible are of course occupied with the enunciation and discussion of general principles in religion. But an even greater portion consists of the petitions, the praises and the pious reflections of men who are telling from their hearts what life has meant to them personally—what cries for help its trials have extorted from them, what responses God has granted them in the midst of hard duty and strong struggles, and what calm of faith they have come to as they fared forward in the midst of opposition and perils.

It is true indeed that these recitals of fears and

triumphs are sometimes wrenched from their real significance and made into blind puzzles for the devout by an unadvised exegesis which treats as a universal generalization what is only the testimony of this or that saint to his own experience of the world. The late Dr. A. Woodruff Halsey used to tell how, as he read from the Bible to his saintly mother in his boyhood, she intervened when he came to that verse in the thirty-seventh Psalm which says: "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." "Stop there, Woody," she cried; "I have." And the good Christian lady was not disputing inspiration, either; she was simply with admirably unconventional candour recognizing the utterance for exactly what inspiration presented it—one certain psalmist's own observation of God's care over His people. Mrs. Halsey's observation happened to be different, and it was neither irreverent nor skeptical for her to say so.

One reads likewise in the ninety-first Psalm another psalmist's assurance in the midst of some great plague that the pestilence would not be permitted to smite his life to destroy it. No doubt his confidence in the special providence of such protection was fulfilled for him—the psalm would scarcely have been preserved otherwise. Yet its appearance in the Bible is no guarantee that all other God-fearing men will be delivered from death in any and every peril that may happen to overtake them. Every man's times are in the

hand of a loving Lord, and there are no guarantees to any man except that if he does his best for God, God will do what is best for him.

None the less these tributes of trust and praise which holy men of old have been prompted out of their own private experience of God's goodness to render to Him for all His mercies, have their rightful and honoured place in the book by which God is pleased to reveal His ways and purposes to mankind. They testify, not to any mechanical contrivance by which God grinds out good things to men from the wheels and cogs of an irrespective fate, but to the everlasting kindliness with which He watches over each of His children and apportions to each what shall best reward his deservings, best discipline his shortcomings and bring him most securely to the particular rounding out of life that best fulfills the particular fitness of his particular soul.

Especially do these and a hundred other passages testify to the great and comprehensive fact that God's allotments to the righteous are allotments of prosperity and gladness many times oftener than He apportions the allotments of woe and sorrow, to which bear witness other Biblical transcripts of Christian experience equally inspired because equally real. Not from one sort of Scripture nor from the other taken alone—neither from the triumphantly joyful nor from the dolefully sorrowful—would a modern Bible student derive a full and fair account of God's dealings with His children whom He loves. But with the light of

the one kind of Bible testimony mingling amid the shading and the shadows of the darker sort, the Christian who attends to the Scriptures in whole and not in part sees a picture vivid with all the mercies, both dark and bright, of an ever living and ever loving Father.

Vain then are the arguments which the schools bring to demonstrate the authority of the Scriptures—impotent the resolutions that assemblies adopt rebuking those who acknowledge doubts. The Bible's ascendancy over the minds of men can be confirmed by no such external measures. All is done when personally for each Bible-reader that happens which Cowper describes so simply—the truest, finest thing ever written about the Bible outside itself:

> "The Spirit breathes upon the word
> And brings the truth to light."

## XI

# THE EMPLOYMENT OF REASON

IS it impertinent to exercise the human reason on a book of divine inspiration? Over this question many Christians conceive that a profoundly divisive difference exists in the contemporary Church. On the part of a host of conservatives it is received as an axiom that what God has published to the world as His word of authority must in the nature of the case be read with unquestioning acceptance. From this standpoint it is no wonder that men who write books of Biblical criticism appear impious persons.

The matter here at stake is not, however, entirely axiomatic. A deeper issue than either conservatives or liberals realize underlies the question. The thing to be first decided is whether God has given men a book on which it is suitable for them to bring reason to bear—or whether it is a book in essence forbidding to reason. If God meant His volume of Scripture never to be reasoned about, then of course it is impertinence to offer a man's opinion concerning it. But if God intended His book to awaken and summon forth the gift of reasoning with which He has endowed man, then refusing to apply reason to the Bible is irreverent.

Can we know how in this particular it is God's pleasure to have the Scriptures dealt with?

In the familiar forms of secular writing it is never difficult to determine which are intended to encourage and which to discourage independent exercise of the mind. One type of expression conspicuously not calculated to induce thought readily suggests itself; it is the highly specialized style in which the civic laws of modern states are written. Any one who has so much as looked inside a statute book knows the reiteration of terms, the multiplication of synonyms, the enumeration of every conceivable contingency, whereby it is hoped to put the letter of the law beyond the possibility of two constructions at any point whatever. The man therefore who reads a legislative act is supposed to have but one business laid upon him; that is to comprehend what the law says. Reasoning, pro or con, on these premises, is superfluous.

It is true, indeed, that this theory of the matter fails to work out. An endless succession of judicial decisions learnedly interpreting disputed legislation constitutes an ever present proof that people do not understand the laws identically, howsoever painstakingly legislators may draw them. But always this effort to be unmistakable results in a quite distinctive kind of product, which on the most casual reading exposes the purpose to regimentalize all ideas based upon it. Something of the same kind may be observed in school text-books—especially text-books in the sciences—

where language is put through its best disciplined paces with the sole idea of forbidding it to mean or even to suggest anything more than the one exact conception which standard science is ready to ratify. Theology also, writing its creeds with a like concern to mean just what it means and no more nor less, has to adopt much the same kind of strait-laced pronunciamento diction.

What is to be thought of here, however, is not the success or the ill success of such efforts to say something that can neither be debated nor variously interpreted. The more important observation just now is that no writing which even aims at that effect—legal, scientific, creedal or in any form dogmatic—ever impressed anybody as literature. Literature in all tongues and in all times has exactly the opposite influence. Instead of circumscribing and confining thought, standardizing opinion and repressing imagination, literature fires and stirs minds that read, until thought leaps up to seize ideals belonging in loftier altitudes and imagination takes wings to distances that the mere words as written would never measure.

Who would read a poem that tied down the soul to the baldly literal sense of each noun and adjective and verb used to fill out the beat of the meter? A poem is no poem unless it releases fancies and aspirations and bids them soar where the only chart is the sunny joy of living in the love of God. Chains and walls can be made of words, and walls, if not chains, have their uses. But such are not the winged words of literature. They do not con-

fine but set free. They do not forbid men to think; they compel thinking. They do not dull and stifle reason; they arouse the reason with scores of questions and set it searching earth and heaven for answers fit to be named rational. What really good book, out of all that are found written by men in all the libraries of the world, can a man read without stirring his reasoning powers into vivid activity—accumulating confirmations, extending deductions, applying principles to added instances?

From this digression then the inquiry returns to ask once more which kind of book God has prepared for men in His Bible. Is it a manual of statutes restricting human life within a framework of unyielding rules? Or is it a volume of enfranchising literature challenging men to adventure the greatening of their spiritual knowledge by exploration of the ways of God? Manifestly, indeed, a part of the Bible is formed on the pattern of all legalism—a structure of minute external requirements wrought into an inflexible system of corporate conformity. Such is the character of the Mosaic law, which constitutes so large a fraction of the second, third, fourth and fifth books of the Old Testament. Certain later parts of the same Testament likewise, though they do not partake of the form, are characterized in general by the same governing outlook.

But of the larger mass of the Bible there need be no hesitance in naming a different classification. The contributions made to its contents by its poets

(both dramatic and lyric), its sages of the old Hebrew "wisdom," its story-tellers, its prophets, its evangelists, its apostles, and above all, by its immortal Messiah—all these are literature of a quality shiningly beyond all categories of "the letter," which Paul complained of as "killing" the spirituality of believers. They all instead are instinct with the spirit which (quoting Paul again) "giveth life." Indeed, the richest treasures of Bible literature are those very words which He who spoke them declared to be in and of themselves "spirit and life."

Utterly vain then is it to talk of not employing human reason on the Bible. With a non-literary Bible that might be feasible, but not with this Bible. In the presence of a book crammed with ideas that awaken the human mind as spring sunshine awakens sleeping flowers, by what unnatural and repressive magic is it proposed to prevent reason from sharing in the response of the soul? Or who imagines that when God calls humanity to participate in His glowing and kindling thoughts, He invites the tribute of every faculty in human nature save that which is best able to appreciate purpose, plan, cause, effect, continuity and consistency? When did the Creator ever brand man's reason as unholy—unfit to handle the sacred things of either His deeds or of His words?

Equally impermissible is it to suppose that man's reason is bidden to engage itself only with those things in the Scriptures that are plain to see and understand; the very nature of reason, as God has

embedded it in the intelligence of men, gives it a houndlike scent for what is not plain, for what is apparently altogether non-understandable. It would be therefore mere mockery for the Giver of the Bible to set a boundary in it between the obvious and the obscure, and prohibit the reader from taking his reasonableness with him across that line. To be sure, the keenest of reason will never penetrate to the center of religion's mysteries. But let us be also sure that God hinders it not from going as far as it is able. It is preposterous to put all this artificial enmity between reason and revelation. God gave both, and He prepared the one that it might receive the other. He has fitted each to each. Every page of the Bible might be justly inscribed with the invitation which stands in living letters on the first page of the Prophet Isaiah: "Come now and let us reason together, saith Jehovah." Reason is God's joy—not His "black beast."

It is by no means beside the mark here to observe how ironical a paradox dogs the footsteps of those who maintain that every Bible utterance is to be taken in its simplest literal sense and must not be subjected in any particular to rationalizing interpretation. This they cling to, oblivious of the pragmatic contradiction which their very orthodoxy compels. For their theory also obliges them to hold that every Bible verse in its simple literal sense is an explicitly exact statement of fact. When therefore two such verses appear on their face to present quite different views of matters to

which both allude—and any Bible reader knows how often that happens—there comes a serious strain on consistency. No other resort is open than to proceed to "reconcile" them by whatever supposition appears least violent. It often seems, when one picks up a typical Bible commentary of the literalist school, that the larger portion of the volume is occupied with the anxious labour of such reconciliations.

By what means then is this reconciling accomplished? Why, by means of human reason applied to interpret concordantly the text of the Scriptures. There is no other means by which it can be done. No matter how strenuously a man may contend that such and such a single passage must be taken to signify just what it says, when he brings two passages together (especially if their harmony is to his mind predetermined), he finds himself in spite of himself reasoning out unity between them according to his own intelligence. An inference from one statement applied to amplify a scanter allusion in the other; an explanation, transferred perhaps in the opposite direction, carrying a new shade of colour into a narrative that standing alone would bear a quite different implication; the composite revision of an entire story in order to weave in all the incidents found in two independent accounts—these are familiar expedients to which conservative scholars engaged in the exegesis of the Bible are constrained to devote prodigious ingenuity.

Such devices are of course employed in all sin-

cerity of devotion to the truth of God; they are honest efforts to make that truth more lucid. But certainly the reflective and the scrupulous among students using these methods of exposition cannot pretend to abide by the dictum that men have no right to invade the realm of divine revelation with reason's readjustments. It is that very thing that they are doing all the while. Their experience and example are rather a practical demonstration that the Bible cannot be appropriated in all its values by anybody who does not look at it in the light of the best human faculties that can be brought to bear upon it.

It may seem a jesting "tu quoque" to say of the literally orthodox in Bible studies that they are more inveterate rationalists than the higher critics whom they so unanimously condemn. But it is not a jest; it is the easily observable fact. Confronting a so-called "difficulty" as between two seemingly disagreeing portions of Scripture, the liberal scholar is usually content to let the text stand undisturbed and even unexplained just as it is. The conservative, on the contrary, weaves a great net of cross references by which he drags the questioned paragraph or chapter into a decidedly different orientation. Sometimes the new angle of vision opened up by this process puts the truth in clearer light, and the scholarship which accomplishes it would elicit the gratitude of all Bible-lovers except for one flaw in its picture of reality—the pious pretense that the result reached in this fashion is itself dogmatically infallible and

not the product of a purely human exercise in the art of rationalizing the varied materials of the Bible.

An instance of the tireless zeal with which these rationalistic efforts are carried on by those who imagine that nothing else will put an unshakable foundation under the Bible, is the labour that has been spent to explain how it happened that King Saul did not recognize the youth who fought Goliath if that youth, according to the letter of the history, had already been Saul's favourite harper in his own court. The higher critic says: "Two traditions"—and lets it go at that. The man who believes that he is no kind of a critic at all, who boasts that he takes everything in the Bible in exactly the way it is stated and asks no question, says: "Now we have got to figure this thing out" —and puckers his brows for hours at a time attempting to range all the data of the story in one consistent chain. He has a perfect right to. But it's reason he's using; he's an undeniable rationalist—trying by reason to establish something not said in the Bible.

A case still more egregious of the same character is the premillennial program which a strong party of uncompromising dogmatists have worked out, professing to show the exact course of events which must intervene between the present hour and the reappearance of Jesus Christ on the earth —including the surreptitious removal from the world of all true Christians and an ensuing eruption of general horror outdoing the worst previous

experiences of the race. Every item of this prediction is supported by an authentic Bible citation. Nevertheless it is precisely true to say that nothing like this foreseen history can be read in any part of the Bible. As a connected prophecy it is wholly a piece of man's device. For in spite of these quotations all being in Scripture, there is not even the ground plan there for the scheme of association by which they are brought together.

Many of the passages thus used were never supposed either by their writers or by their earlier readers to have anything to do with the end of the world. Of others it can only be said that the exegesis to which premillenarians submit them leaves lingering in free minds a large measure of doubt. But putting these things aside, the matter evident beyond controversy is that, however infallible may be the individual proof-texts of this cult, the pattern of the mosaic into which they are forcibly fitted bears not the faintest glint of infallibility. They could be laid together quite as readily in a totally different design; in fact, that has been often done by postmillennialists who felt just as sure of themselves as the premillennialists could ever be. It ought to be the candid admission of the latter that their picture of great and terrible events speedily to come is not what the Scripture says, but what their own very human reason has somewhat plausibly managed to make Scripture appear to say. It is rationalism pure and simple—though certainly not to be branded untrue on that sole account.

It is then not simply allowable to bring the inspired Scriptures under the survey of human reason; it is by the very character of the book rendered imperative. And this necessity has bearings far wider than the comparatively insignificant matters that have served us for passing illustration. There is involved in it the primary vindication of that often scorned discipline of the church —systematic theology. There is no systematic theology in the Bible, but the Bible none the less conducts the actively thoughtful student to a point where some kind of theology, more or less systematic, becomes the indispensable apparel of his pilgrimage. He gets it by weaving Bible woof into the warp of his own inquisitive soul, and the fabric often outlasts the long journey.

More popularly significant, however, is the propriety which by this view of reason and the Bible is conceded to Biblical criticism as a reverential employment for competent Christian men. In great sections of the Church there still prevails the inquisitorial prejudice which would put criticism of the Scriptures in the calendar of supreme atrocities. But when it is once shown that the conservative is as little able as the radical to avoid judging the Bible with whatever intellectual light he has—that virtually God Himself has compelled such judgment—there must certainly ensue a saner attitude toward the critics and a better discrimination between the good and the bad among them—or as is perhaps safer to say, between the better and the worse.

Much misunderstanding and even more hatred, as useless as it is unjustifiable, inhere in the chronic misreading of the very term "criticism." Even persons of education and extensive knowledge suffer themselves subconsciously to entertain the vernacular sense of the verb "criticise" and of its derivatives, assuming that criticism is simply an inveterate faultfinding, elevated in the universities to the dignity of a learned profession. But of course this phraseology as applied to the Bible and all Bible subjects rises to the plane of the technical conception cherished in literature and the arts—the thought that criticism is, first of all, applause of excellencies, and only by negative consequence comes round to the marking of faults. To the Bible critic then the Church should come not expecting a discount on the Scriptures, enforced by a catalogue of defects and deficiencies, but frankly anticipating from him some fresh tribute to the greatness and grandeur of the book of God.

Were that anticipation prevalent among everyday Christians, pastors and laymen, its magnetism would no doubt draw forth from scholarship an expanding eloquence on the power and nobility of the massive Bible entire, in lieu of penny-counting rivalries to see who can collect from odd corners of the book the largest symposium of insignificant guesses at possible mistakes. Already there is a great change observable from the negative effect of earlier movements of criticism, and the morning of appreciation following a too lengthy night

of depreciation is surely dawning over the Scriptural studies of this generation. When that morning is fully come all men will be able to see how fruitful is the result of sowing human intelligence in an inspired soil.

There are those who consider it a useful discrimination to divide between constructive critics and destructive critics, applauding the former, anathematizing the latter. But that test is rather too tedious in confirmation to serve for present guidance; not for a generation or two will it be possible to tell whether our contemporary critics are constructing what will stand or destroying what ought to stand. But there is a distinction which should always be easy for the just-minded to apply. There are some critics who despise the Bible and are bent on ridiculing it into oblivion; there are other critics who love it and are passionately anxious to set it forth in so clear and appealing a light that it will win constantly—and most of all among the young—more faith, more trust, more usage, more vital vogue in private lives and popular affairs. The first, no matter how erudite they are or even how meticulously correct, are not of our company; let them range themselves with the foe. But the other sort—the true Bible-lovers—are allies in the militant kingdom of God with all good disciples of Jesus Christ, and in their fellowship we shall go forward to a brighter and larger appropriation of the revelation of God as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

And yet—and yet—let us remind ourselves, ere we pass from this theme, that none of the Bible writers were either critics or theologians in any such sense as these terms convey in present-day schools and churches. This is true even of Paul and John, who are now regarded as prototypes and patron saints of all the race and lineage of theological professors. John at Ephesus preached Jesus as the eternally preëxistent Word by whom all things were made, and Paul with passionate earnestness wrote to the Romans of God's ability to justify sinners because of the propitiation wrought on the cross in the blood of Christ. In what they said of these matters there were included all the elements out of which have been later constructed the theological doctrines of the Trinity and the atonement. But neither Paul nor John nor any other Bible writer ever developed either of these fundamental articles of the Christian faith into a philosophic dogma.

Afterward came those who, when they had said that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are equally divine, found themselves constrained in their own minds to try to define how these three personalities could consist together in one Godhead—to say how men might believe in the Godhead of all three without believing in three Gods. Likewise they deemed it needful to describe in terms of philosophy just how it was that the death of Christ on the cross enabled the Holy God to blot out the sins of the unholy and receive them to Himself. They who felt this urge were not,

however, the apostles or their contemporaries; they were a later rank of Christian leaders—the generation of Nicæa and thereabouts. Their work, therefore, while worthy of immense honour, bears no such peculiar seal of divinity as the inspiring Spirit has used to certify the New Testament. The formulation of theology was strictly a post-Biblical development.

Whoever then with sincerity regards the Bible as the paramount standard by which faith is to be tested, must needs recognize as orthodox any faith accepting and building upon the Bible facts, whether the philosophy now derived from those facts agrees or does not agree with explanations of the same that were favoured by the Nicene and later theologians. The modern disciple who like Paul looks upon Jesus as "existing in the form of God," by that consideration alone comes well within the range of the historic trinitarianism of Christianity. And he is not to be excluded if in place of the Nicene distinction of three persons in one God he distinguishes rather three manifestations of one God. From anything that Paul or John wrote on the subject it is impossible to tell which was the view of either of them. Perhaps, in the midst of engrossing missionary and pastoral service, neither ever penetrated far enough into the psychic problem to work out a definite thought of how the Son was metaphysically related to the Father.

So too these great apostolic teachers probably never weighed and balanced theories of the atone-

ment as Christian philosophers have done in the centuries since. So far as their writings tell, the apostles simply took the fact and ended there. They said: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." And inasmuch as that message effectually saved men, it fully contented the preachers of it. Whoever then can truly echo that word, is an orthodox follower of the apostles. He believes and teaches the atonement. And it is all one whether he considers that Jesus thus died for the sinner as a substituted sacrifice or in a great dramatic demonstration of an everlasting divine love stronger than death and supreme in unselfishness. Taking the atonement either way, the Christian is honestly accepting all that the Bible says. Explanations one way or the other are purely human addenda, in which no doubt it is pleasing to God for the speculations of men to range broadly, since the sum of them all, woven into the chain of reverent Christian thought, still constitutes a measure far too short to encompass the whole significance of Christ's self-devotion in life and in death for the sinner's sake.

Let us then by no means discard our theologies. Used aright, they can cast great illumination on the pathway of the Church's progress to the fuller meanings of religion. But let us ever remember that not our theologies, but the Gospel about, of and in our Lord Jesus Christ, is the power that is to save the world. And it is not theology but Gospel that the Bible furnishes. So may we accustom ourselves often to return from the cloistered re-

treats in which the philosophers of the Church work out their elaborate reconstructions of Bible data, and seek company instead with the first direct and urgent preachers of the evangel, who, innocent of the dogmatizing which less eager ages have loitered to indulge, "knew nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified." We shall be closer to the real heart of our Lord the oftener we set aside all later sophistications and refresh our souls anew with the spontaneous simplicities amid which Jesus and His twelve companions walked in the early days of our religion.

## XII

## MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

THE fear prompting resistance to the use of men's reason in Bible exegesis is more than all else a dread of what will happen to the miracle stories in the book. The modern mind, everybody realizes, is not predisposed to accept miracle stories from any source, being of course in this respect quite opposite to the general mind of the times in which the Bible was produced. Will not then twentieth-century reason, if given free sweep, expel from the Bible every example of supernatural intervention? It is this peril which, as many conceive, can only be met by saying to men: "Whatever is told in this book you must believe just because it is found here. You are not permitted to inquire about the accuracy of any of it."

It would perhaps make for quietude in many quarters if the matter could be so clamped down and left undisturbed. But if we have been at all right in arguing that the Bible is not only lawfully open to the investigations of human reason but is divinely calculated to invoke (even provoke) such investigation, then it is clear that the miracles related therein cannot be excluded from the scope

of this questioning. Nor can a predetermined authentication of them be guaranteed before the inquiry begins. Predetermination of the outcome takes the honesty out of any inquiry. Nevertheless the case for the miraculous is not to be thought forfeited by granting such freedom. Independent external corroboration that the marvels told of in the Bible actually happened has of course long since become impossible. But the moral presumptions in favour of that supernatural setting in which the major miracles of Bible history appear —and in which their spiritual significance makes them rationally plausible—grow stronger as views of Bible revelation grow more comprehensive.

It will increase, however, for the believer both the clarity of his own thinking on this subject and his sympathy for those who are unable to partake of his credence, if he considers why the mind of these times has a difficulty with miracles which earlier generations did not experience. There is in part involved no doubt a certain unmoral resistance to religious obligation, but that is nothing new. There has always been in use among irreligious men some such "protective mechanism" for shielding uncomfortable consciences; an impersonal discussion of theology is much more agreeable to sustain than pointed reference to the need for correcting one's own attitude toward God. In all generations whatever matters might at the time be topics of current controversy in religion, have been impartially availed of by persons whose only really anxious care was to

save themselves from being driven to close quarters on the subject of their own spiritual duty. Such people to-day find that nothing else serves so well for defensive diversion as the loud announcement: "I don't believe in the miracles that we read about in the Bible."

Yet this in no way accounts for the specific trouble which nowadays men have in adjusting their intelligence to the conception of a miracle. Thousands of the devoutest spirits who live in these times feel that their confession of faith in Jesus Christ and His Gospel would be perfectly easy—and supremely joyous—if only it was not necessary to accept narratives that relate things outside the course of nature which He did or were done in Him. Here without question has come the great reversal that affects religion more than any other one item in the mental progress of the Christian era. When Jesus was on earth it would have been hard for typical men of the age to believe in any religion which was not evidenced by marvels manifesting the direct intervention of Almighty God. Now we live in an age when very many would find themselves much more able to put confidence in the reality of religion if there were no miraculous factors—at least, physically miraculous—in any way attached to it.

This is a tremendous shift of viewpoint which certainly the men of the time of Jesus—either His disciples or His enemies—never so much as dreamed of. If He Himself foresaw it, that of itself would afford a strong ratification for the

claim that as a truly divine Teacher He brought to earth a message superior to the contingencies of human change and valid until the "consummation of the age." And did He not foresee? Why else was He so impatient with "an evil and adulterous generation" that "seeketh after a sign"? Again and again He refused to do miracles which people around Him—though perhaps insincerely—promised to accept as tokens of His Messiahship. To be sure, the Master could not wholly omit "mighty works" in an epoch of life when for any messenger of God miracles were regarded as indispensable credentials. Doing them not for show but for service, He did perform miracles of which all who were concerned might take knowledge. He knew that there were many who would believe Him only "for the very works' sake." Those, therefore, He gave their fair chance—the "witness" which their stage of spiritual perception required.

But even while He accorded to certain disciples this testimony of the "works," He voiced a deeper satisfaction in the faith of those who did not need such an outward show of proof—who just from the forthright spiritual convincingness of the message were able to believe on His word alone that, as He expressed it, "I am in the Father and the Father in me." Surely in His prospective hope there was even then the vision of a more deeply religious future when men would not be asking for material marvels to assure them of the presence of God in the world, but with a keener awareness

of spiritual things, would see in the very character of Christ Himself the surer evidence of eternal Fatherhood yearning for the good of humanity. If indeed such was the vision before His eyes then, how happy He must be with this present age of ours, when it is very certain that the Personality revealed by His own incarnation has become an argument for faith ten thousand times more powerful than all the miracles that He ever wrought.

If the Lord did thus forecast a time when men would care little for outward miracles and much for the inward miracles of grace, He certainly did not look forward to it as an age of doubt—as so many dolefully insist that the present age is—but as an age of faith. There is, as we have just acknowledged, something of infidelity in current discounting of miracles, but on the whole there is in it a good deal more of sincere and trustful religious principle. For the modern Christian stumbles in this matter over no doubt of God's power. He stumbles over no factitious dogmatism asserting that there are laws of nature which nature's God is incapable of transcending. He presumes on no fiction of invariable nature or human nature. He has indeed but a single puzzle to disturb him in all these premises. It is best pictured in the words of the apostle who wrote to the Hebrews: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and forever." That is what every reverent thought of Jesus Christ would say of Him; and if of Him, how much more of the Father

in heaven whom He so constantly and lovingly proclaimed! Flux and mutation on earth; new ideas and new ways constantly developing among mankind; but with God as supreme governor of an ordered universe, with Jesus as supreme revealer of the divine character, surely no novelty or amendment or revised policy.

Here then is where the great hazard comes in the path of a simple faith approaching the miracles: There are no miracles now; why were there miracles in Bible times? Has God changed? Or is His arm shortened so that in our day He cannot do what once He did? If miraculous demonstrations of His power were once a part of the discipline of the law and of the preaching of the Gospel, why is there no such evidence in our day? A miracle is not simply an unexplained wonder; wonders in nature and science are innumerable and few of them explained. A miracle is a wonder which does not recur. And the whole hardship about believing it lies in the fact that it does not happen again.

For this perplexity there is but one possible manner of solution within the range of a rational faith. Of course God cannot change, nor is Jesus different to-day from what He was yesterday. But the world changes, and the Immutable and Infinite One is neither so poor in resource nor so vagrant in adaptability that He can fit no new means to the training of an advancing race. A glimpse of progressive educational method in the Bible, by which simpler ideas were commended to

the simpler people of a simpler time, and a higher range of thinking and fact opened to the understanding of a more developed age, has already interested us. And it may very well have been in the same divine curriculum simply another aspect which proved God's reality in earlier days by supernatural acts in the physical creation, but in later times has preferred to rely on the supernatural spiritual experiences of men whom Christ has saved from sin.

Analogies that may be drawn from the pedagogy which instructs our children in modern schools lie parallel to such a thought. What is the teaching method of the kindergarten? Blocks, balls, games, sand-boxes, crayons—everything concrete for object lessons. What the method of the university professor? Lectures, assignments of themes, discussions, references to the written authorities—everything in the abstract for reason to take hold of and for reflection to elaborate. Allow that God kept a kindergarten equipped with object lessons in the elder time, and in this day is getting His pupils on toward the university stage—is there not sufficient suggestion there of reasons why there should once have been objective miracles which this generation no longer sees? God has simply substituted for His former appeal to the eyes of men a new and higher appeal to the consciousness of the human soul. And if we have interpreted Jesus rightly, all this is a graduation into higher things for which He was exceedingly eager when He was in the world.

It is also to be mentioned that extraordinary conditions always require exceptional measures. Furthermore, unique conjunctions of powers and forces must produce unprecedented results. This observation applies to God's moral universe to-day exactly the same as ever. In this sense the age of miracles is not past and can never pass while the universe endures. If God had some purpose to accomplish to-day which natural means would not suffice to carry through, He would assuredly not let the purpose fail for lack of miraculous interposition. Indeed, the story of mankind abounds, as much outside the Bible as inside it, with instances of those "lucky chances" or "providential developments" which have again and again given victory to righteous causes against apparently hopeless odds. As acts of immediate divine control over the otherwise uncertain contingencies of life, such events have to the senses of faith all the characteristics of miracle, except the deflection of nature's accustomed cause and effect. They are distinctly supernatural interventions. And the keener the crisis between good and bad, the less strange is the intervention. The path made for Israel across the Red Sea would have been incredible in any ordinary case; on the day when the fate of a nation destined for the service of God hangs in the balance, anything which saves a people is credible.

But, as of course all Christians know, the pinnacle heights of miracle in the Bible are reached in the life of Jesus Christ, Himself as God manifest

in the flesh the Miracle of the ages. Here once it may have been the miracles that proved the Man, but to-day it is the Man who proves the miracles. Considering how different He is from other men, as the conviction of accumulating centuries more and more attests—as the twentieth century better than all its predecessors appreciates—we can hold it nothing unbelievable that His earthly life began, proceeded and ended with circumstances such as have attached to no other life known to humanity.

A Person elevated in quality of character and in dynamic of influence so far above the best attainments of the race elsewhere, indexes the presence of vitalities and potencies more transcendently divine than ever centered in any other single life in this world. How reasonable then are the memoirs of His career, which show forth those unmatched forces in unmatched victory over enmity and hate, in unmatched ministration to evil, misery and sorrow—which reflect the shine of heavenly lights along all the path by which the Master walked His way through the midst of men—which reveal Him dispensing the gracious mercies of God the Father to the poorest and most hopeless of all that He met. That radiant story no man could wish to replace with a picture less beautiful. Is it possible that any man could be happier for replacing it with a record poorer in beneficent power?

The one supremely appropriate miracle in all this gracious life, persuasively crowning all else that is told us concerning Jesus Christ, is His resurrection. That mighty event is commended to

the belief of the world not only by the historical circumstances surrounding it—by the admitted truth that the Lord's rising from the dead explains, and nothing else does explain, the astonishing return of faith and hope to the disciples whom His crucifixion plunged into despair. It is also and even more profoundly made real to the spiritually sensitive soul by a consciousness of the fitting culmination to which it brought the earthly stay of the incarnate "Word of God." The power of that life was a power which in its eternal preëminence of strength and beauty was justly destined to conquer the grave; by moral instinct the believer feels what the great preacher of Pentecost proclaimed to the Jerusalem multitude: "It was not possible that he should be holden of death." More still, the rising of Jesus offers a pledge of immortality to the human hunger for immortality such as emerges nowhere else to satisfy the anxious heart of man. In all these ways the crown of the miracles relates itself to the spiritual experience of the race and obtains a verification which, though it counts for nothing in demonstrative logic, counts for everything in the trust of mankind.

If it were possible to make the same kind of affirmation about the miracle which accomplished the incarnation of the Divine Word one of the most entangled problems of current religion would be greatly simplified. Was Christ miraculously born of a virgin? The narrative which tells us so is quite as plain and explicit as the narrative which reports the empty tomb and the reappearance of

the crucified Master among His followers. And there would be no more doubt of the former than of the latter in reverent minds if the miraculous conception stood now in any such relation to Christian experience as the resurrection does. Until a recent day in the history of the Church the virgin birth of Christ has expressed a concrete value to both individual faith and corporate theology. It was the sign and seal of the "fullness of the Godhead" dwelling bodily in Jesus that He should have been born without other father than His Father in heaven. And that same sense of a miracle birth as necessary for the incarnate God would have still been persisting in full power within the evangelical Church if there had not come over the world, with the dawn of an intensely scientific age, that universal change in point of view which has been already alluded to.

This change replaced with a very different basic thought the old assumption that God can be seen and known to work only in some totally unprecedented act which cannot be referred to natural law. The new opinion that God is just as divinely present in any of the common operations of nature as He could be in the most remarkable special miracle, is beyond all question an immense gain for faith—the extension of religious sacredness over a measureless area of routine circumstance and ordinary life. But it has had in this respect an unforeseen and, to a degree, disturbing consequence. It has occurred to certain men of faith—not of unfaith—to ask why it should be supposed

to be necessary to work a miracle in order to house the Eternal Reality within the tabernacle of a human body? A spiritual miracle—that it was, undeniably. But why a physical miracle?

A generation that believes in God as the worker of every work, from the upthrust of a grass-blade to the unfolding of immortal personality, has no philosophical answer for that question. It might be said that men could not believe in a divine incarnation without a superhuman birth, but that assertion falls to the ground at once in face of the fact that many men do so believe. They count on every human conception and every human birth as the work of God, and they are unprepared to say that He who by this means supplies human bodies with human souls would be impotent by the like means to supply one human body with a Divine Soul.

The upreach of men's hearts for a Saviour with the power of God in his hands and the love of God in his breast, which under other circumstances would clinch the doctrine of the virgin birth in the unbreakable grip of spiritual necessity, is in these conditions not so imperative. And many doubts wander through the Church, asking why it is that Jesus staked no divine claims on His miraculous coming into the world; why His mother and His brethren were apparently so indifferent to His supernatural origin; why the apostles never incorporated the virgin birth into their evangel; why especially John, who so powerfully teaches the eternal preëxistence of Mary's Son, sets no

store on the proof of a physical origin different from that of other men?

All these questions, painful as they are to the sensibilities of old-time disciples, must be faced, dealt with, responded to; it would be a fatal confession of intellectual cowardice for the Church anywhere to forbid the discussion of the problem or anathematize those who raise the question. The Church must always be for opening every question wide; it is only so that all the truth can come out. And in this case all occasion for panic or for dread of consequences to ensue disappears in the presence of one superlative thought-mark of this present time—the constantly increasing modern appreciation of Jesus—His character, His words, His work.

Whether men do or do not esteem Him to have been brought into the world by a miracle, they do esteem Him the superlative Teacher of mankind in the truths of the spiritual life—the one supreme Mentor of the consciences of men. Such is the consensus which now approximates unanimity throughout the thoughtful world. And men do not rate Him simply as a man either; without the refinements of theological definition which the creeds attempt, the world calls Him its one actual superman and at the least a neighbour to the divine.

Even those who doubt the virgin birth are not thinking to dishonour Jesus. The unclean slur about an illegitimate parentage has been, so far as modern discussion goes, no suggestion of these

doubters; it was a boomerang foolishly thrown by certain orthodox defenders of Christ and the Bible. The other parties to the question have constantly said that if the birth story of Jesus as told in Luke is not literal fact, it is sacred legend developing from a great loyalty to Him which thus sought to account for the vast contrasts visible between Jesus and the rest of humanity. And in the end it may decisively serve to vindicate the literalness of the nativity narrative that its critics have elected to stand on just this alternative to its historicity. We have already observed that a miracle birth is hard to believe in our environment because natural birth itself seems to us a divine wonder. There was in the orient in ancient times one nation only which felt just that way—the Hebrew nation, which always said: "Lo, children are a heritage of Jehovah." The Jewish people, therefore, never had the mental background that would suggest a poetic imagination of miraculous paternity as a tribute of honour to any man. The Greeks made myths on that supposition; there is not a sign of any such strain in Hebrew thought. Yet the stories of Christ's birth are Hebrew—purely Hebrew. On the strictest critical grounds it is easier to accept their actuality than to presume them fanciful. Hebrews would have been little more likely to invent such a story than Americans.

Yet all this is but a secondary matter where the consciousness of Christians has responded to the supreme and sublime New Testament revelation of

Jesus of Nazareth as the only begotten Son of God, who "being found in fashion as a man humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross—wherefore God highly exalted him and gave unto him the name which is above every name." It is He, Jesus Christ, who is the all comprehending Miracle of the Bible, and so long as the ascending star of His incarnate divinity is rising higher on the firmament of human idealism—as it surely is to-day—there need be none to fear in His case "the elimination of the supernatural element from the Scriptures." Perchance there might here or there be some one rash enough to think he could accomplish that feat. But what can he do while of the whole book Jesus Himself remains the "chief corner-stone"?

## XIII

## LIBERALISM WITHIN ORTHODOXY

THE opinions touching the Bible which have been set down in the foregoing studies have consulted no authority except the Scriptures themselves. There is, however, a deep satisfaction in finding, when the subject has been so far traversed, that the conclusions arrived at are in large accord with what was said about the Scriptures by the Puritan theologians who gathered at Westminster in 1645 to erect a Reformation structure of doctrine and polity for the Protestantism of England.

The stalwart Confession of Faith which they elaborated is sufficient certificate for the intellectual power of the members of that famous assembly, and a present-day pilgrim may fairly feel that he has not wandered into any domain of folly when he reaches a resting-place within sight of their celebrated heights. But more important is the reassurance which must be afforded to many by discovering how remote from "modernism," judged by this comparison, are some of the views of Scripture which are often nowadays branded as dangerous. The Westminster Confession in defining Bible inspiration is decisively broader in out-

look and far less mechanical in its conception of Scripture authority than many latter-day interpretations professing to be based upon it. Timidities which the Westminster divines did not feel have induced more recent defenders of the faith to block up with too hasty dogmatisms windows which they left open for light and air.

For example, the inerrancy of the Scriptures as to facts of nature and records of history has come to be with a host of contemporary Christians the supreme test of authenticity for the book. But the eloquent and expansive chapter which the Westminster assembly produced on the topic of the Bible contains not the barest suggestion of any such idea. Probably the authors of the confession would not have agreed among themselves whether in this sense the Bible is inerrant. But they did agree in regarding it as needless to establish such a character for the book in order to command for it the honour and reverence and obedience to which it is entitled by the divine supremacy which for far more significant reasons they attributed to it.

The qualities which these men did think requisite in the Bible were such and such only as had evidently to do with the object for which God gave it to humanity. And they had no difficulty in defining to their own satisfaction what that object was. It is surprising but gratifying to find that these learned and philosophic gentlemen, whose flow of language was singularly copious on other aspects of their subject, were terse, simple and sententious when they undertook to say what

God intended the Scriptures for. Two lines suffice. When the books of the Old and New Testaments had been rehearsed in order, they added:

"All which were given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life."

Faith and life! To these ends, vital for every immortal spirit on whom the image of God confers potential partnership in things divine, the teachers and preachers of the Gospel in assembly at Westminster beheld the Holy Bible dedicated by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Seeing the book in this exalted vision, they were delivered from the pettishness of matching jots and tittles between this verse here and another verse there, and were enabled to dwell with a broad admiration, critical in the highest and best sense, on the lofty merits that have invested the Bible with a universal reputation of divinity. In all the literature of classic English there is no finer paragraph of prose than that in which the Westminster creed-makers undertook to enumerate the fine gold and jewels of God's wealth displayed in His one royal book:

"The heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God."

"Doth abundantly evidence itself"—of a truth indeed! What more need be said to make manifest the Bible's supreme value for "faith and life"? Would the Westminster clergy have added aught to their argument in behalf of its "incomparable excellencies" if this recital of theirs had been climaxed with the claim that the book contains a mathematically exact record of the great ages reached by antediluvian patriarchs? They could no doubt have made that statement unqualifiedly; in their time any Christian would have quoted the figures of Genesis for the longevity of Adam, Methuselah and Noah without a quaver of question. As their own fourth chapter shows, these great ecclesiastics took the creation of world, sun, moon and man to have been accomplished in the six days of a single mundane week. It was then no inroad of agnosticism which prompted them to omit inerrancy from their tribute to the perfection of Holy Scripture. They omitted it rather because it lay so far below the plane of their nobler outlook on the grandeur of God's revelation. They omitted it for the same reason that men desert low and shifty seasands for the surety and solidity of the lifting rock; they knew a higher and safer place to stand.

Had therefore these men lived until humanity learned that the earth was not created before the sun, moon and stars which enlighten it; that the making of the universe was the process of an æon rather than of a week; that the antiquity of mankind cannot be calculated by adding up the "gene-

rations" of Genesis, they would have been in no wise shaken in their esteem of the Bible, for they would have perceived that in these extensions of scientific knowledge nothing had developed to alter in the slightest the worth of the book as "the rule of faith and life."

What had changed was the understanding of men concerning the material surroundings in which they dwelt, of which things the Creator had never engaged to make greater or more hasty revelation than their own diligence of inquiry might lead them to. Revelation in its Biblical quality, pertaining to the spiritual duties and spiritual hopes of the sons of God, stood high above all scientific fluctuations and not within touch of the tides of Ptolemaic or Copernican opinion, whether they ebbed or flowed. It affected neither saving grace nor saved life for a man to suppose that the sun revolved about the earth or to know that the earth revolves around the sun.

In the light of this excellent common sense—and just as excellent religious apprehension—the members of the assembly at Westminster stood clear of all fears of conflict between science and religion. It was only a later and more timorous school of Protestants who, thinking the Bible to need more defense than its Author had thrown around it, invented the superfluous requirement that a book inspired for "faith and life" must be also miraculously authoritative on causes, circumstances and consequences in nature. Such teachers had the sad reward of their undue industry,

when their theory—not anything that God had said in the Bible—compelled them in the middle of the nineteenth century to tell the youth of that time that they must reject the evidences of the then rising science of geology in respect to the age of the earth, or else cease to be Christian believers. Only God knows how many souls that folly ruined. And only He can tell what damage was done to the spirituality of America when in the end of the century church leaders well-nigh abandoned the evangelistic ministry of the Gospel to battle for the defense of a dogma respecting "original autographs" which was equally worthless to nurture faith upon or guide life by.

We have not yet, however, indicated the most admirable height to which the Westminster assembly attained in its view of Holy Scripture. It was on its way to that height when it recognized the fact, which these studies have already sought to make clear, that the truth of Scripture is heard not in the single voice of any isolated passage but in the harmony and balance secured by the composition of many voices into one revelation. The writers of the Confession took special pains to stress this. Their paragraph on this point is lucid and unmistakable:

"The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the full and true sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

One might wish to stop a moment to study the authors' use of the word "infallible" in this connection, where it occurs apart from that technical association which customarily attaches it to the thought of inspiration. Here it is plain that the makers of the Confession do not intend to say that the comparison of Scripture with Scripture always results in a conclusion free from the liabilities of human misunderstanding. But they do mean to say that when any Scriptural matter is obscure and perplexing, this is the right road by which to proceed to its clearing up. Not every inquirer who takes this path, indeed, may reach the goal of the perfect truth, but infallibly each step in this direction brings him nearer. It is the always unmistaken method. And that justifies the adjective "infallible."

This, however, is but incidental. The outstanding impression of the paragraph is its clear appreciation that the Bible is not to be judged or to be used piecemeal. The Bible derives its authority from, and accomplishes its service to mankind through, the "consent of all the parts" into which its elements have been worked by the divine Hand. The volume entire is the inspired unit, authenticated with the divine signature underwriting a completed divine design.

The culminating peak of the chapter follows—its last paragraph:

"The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of

councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we can rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."

Of these potent words the significance is still more manifest when—adapting to their own utterances the procedure which these famous theologians recommend for the Bible—we bring into comparison the concluding sentence of their fifth paragraph:

"Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority [of the word of God] is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts."

Here we find these early Puritan thinkers boldly adventuring what most of their successors since have been too timid to risk—staking the potency of inspired Scripture on the response of Christian experience. Against the hazard of this many a nervous champion of religion has protested passionately. "What a catastrophe would befall the world," such a one will cry, "if the experience of men should turn against the Bible—if men should suddenly say the book does not impress them as having anything heavenly about it and cast it out as worthless!" Popular opinion on any subject is fickle, we are reminded, and who knows what day the Bible might be found stripped bare of the favour with which it is now a common fashion to speak of it? And indeed, if there were nothing to take account of but a handful of pages of black-

and-white reading matter on the one hand and a protean crowd psychology on the other, it would be a precarious business to leave the treasures of divine revelation to be certified by the appreciation of an inconstant world. But the men who wrote this now venerable creed were not limited in their calculations to such fluctuating factors. They put faith in certain vast fixities.

They believed in God, who made the book; in the human soul, for which the book was made; in the Holy Spirit, to whose directing use the book was committed; in Jesus Christ, the all-commanding Figure on whom the illumination of the book is focused. Here are changeless quantities which the drift of time cannot remove nor currents and counter currents of popular whimsy wash away. A century since, a century hence and to-day the need of human nature for forgiveness and the urge of human conscience toward a life more fit in righteousness remain as through immemorial time. And God, who "himself knows what is in man," has presciently calculated the Holy Scripture to meet that continuing need, that abiding urge.

Moreover, the Bible does not do its work alone; by the Spirit who lives in and labours through its messages it is applied not in general to the mass of mankind but in selective measure, as individual susceptibility allows or individual guidance may require, to one man and another according to the appropriate portion of each. This is bold faith indeed, but no evangelical orthodoxy ever said less. How, indeed, could a spiritually minded teacher

affirm anything effective of Bible inspiration if he hesitated to affirm that the Spirit who imparted inspiring wisdom to the writers of it imparts enlightened understanding to the readers of it? Certainly there was no such hesitation in the Westminster assembly.

Why then should any one who accepts at all the postulates of revelation think it a tottering foundation to put beneath the permanent influence of Scripture when it is said to rest on the obedient belief it secures from successive generations of humanity? Has that belief or that obedience ever failed in any age since the Bible came to be? It has not. Nor will it until there comes a generation of men who have none of the spiritual longings which the God of the Bible put in them and which He gave them the Bible to satisfy; who have none of the sins from which Jesus Christ came to redeem them; who have totally shut out the infinite Spirit from access to their intelligence, their emotion and their will. Till then the certificate going before every other credential of Scripture will be the testimony which Coleridge voiced for millions:

"In the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together; the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit."

Yes, "the Spirit speaking in the Scripture" is

"the supreme judge" of the actuality of inspired revelation. And His verdicts are rendered not through "decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers," or "doctrines of men," but through the Spirit's "inward work, bearing witness with and by the word in our own hearts." In the inward life of private Christians—their daily audience in the secret place with their Lord—is the decision on the issues of life which constitutes the answer of the living Church to every problem of faith.

The conjoint judgments of the brethren registered in assemblies and councils and conferences stand in all proper dignity on the records of a fraternal Christendom. But every such corporate deliverance must go for naught unless it is ratified in the consciousness of private disciples who read the Bible and pray over it at their own hearthstones. The great convocations of the Church may proclaim what they will to be the truth of God, but none will believe it in the end because it is so proclaimed. It will be believed, if at all, because the Spirit says it is true when each individual man opens the Scriptures and reverently asks for light.

Thus is fulfilled what the Saviour spoke just before He went to His cross; "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak, and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come." This final phrase has been gravely misconstrued by those who have thought it to promise for the Church a power to foresee and

foretell happenings buried in the contingencies of the future. It, of course, means not that at all—as the context shows. But it is a very precious reassurance that no Christian who prays for it unselfishly shall ever be left in want of that divine counsel which is ever waiting to apply anew to the problems of each new age the lasting principles made known in the written Scriptures. And it is not another Spirit, but the same Spirit of truth who inspired the Bible who is now with us to interpret it freshly for every freshly given day of opportunity and obligation.

It will, of course, be objected that this way of claiming the present aid of the one Spirit of inspiration amounts to asserting that additions to the Bible or new utterances as valuable as the Bible might still be produced to-day. And so no doubt there could be, did God so design it. But the "providence of the canon" was a providence of specific intent accomplished in specific time. Being accomplished according to God's plan for creating a perpetual book of standard reference on religion, the making of Scripture is done and ended.

The Bible, in an earlier stage of these studies, has been compared to a course of education for mankind. No course of education aims to teach the student all that he can learn in the world; it only aims to afford him a conspectus of truth with which all that he discovers of truth in later life shall be accordant. The graduate of any school goes out to learn other things than his teachers

told him. But if he has been well taught, he will learn nothing contradictory of what they told him. So the Spirit of truth instructs the Church of today and of all days in many new ways of thinking, serving and giving glory to God. But let no man dread the appearance of "another Gospel." The new unfolding will but confirm the old revealing. There is no contradiction in truth—only ratification by fresh application. The Bible will not be supplemented—still less superseded. It will simply grow in glory as clearer apprehensions reflect its divine knowledge along an ever widening arc of the interests of mankind. And ever it will be the abundant text-book of the Spirit's school for souls.

Evangelical churches all require of those who are set in official responsibility for teaching and government in religion some form expressing their confessed acceptance of the Bible. The Presbyterian formula is typical—a question propounded as follows: "Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?" Will any Christian refuse to say "Yes" happily and boldly whose soul has been "found" deep down by the great things of the book?

A "rule of faith and practice"—that indubitably he needs along the winding, briar-hedged pathways by which he is bound to journey through this perplexing world; a rule to tell how to go and what to hope for and Whom to trust. And the "only rule"—surely that also; for there is no

other to compare with this. An experienced traveller would as soon trade a compass for a wooden stick as this book for any other guide that men have ever tried to follow. More than that, "the only infallible rule"—what's to deny there? Did any man ever miss light or wreck life who humbly took the Bible determined to follow it wherever it directed him? Has it ever been to any man a cheating book, a wrong-leading book? No, "infallible" is a strong word, but not too strong for this book that has stood all tests through all the Christian centuries and is relied on to-day by greater throngs than in any prior day of time who have found it sincere, verifiable, alight with truth.

And the "word of God"—to that the living Spirit ever bears the witness of power that goes forth from it to the redeemed in all climes and nations.

With joy, out of experience in which he humbly trusts himself to have been instructed by the Spirit, the present writer subscribes anew this time-honoured formula:

"I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice."

# Appendix

## WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

### *Chapter I—"Of the Holy Scripture"*

I. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

II. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament, which are these:

(Here follow the names of the books of the Bible as contained in the King James Version.)

All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.

III. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.

IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the in-

fallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

VI. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

VII. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

X. The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

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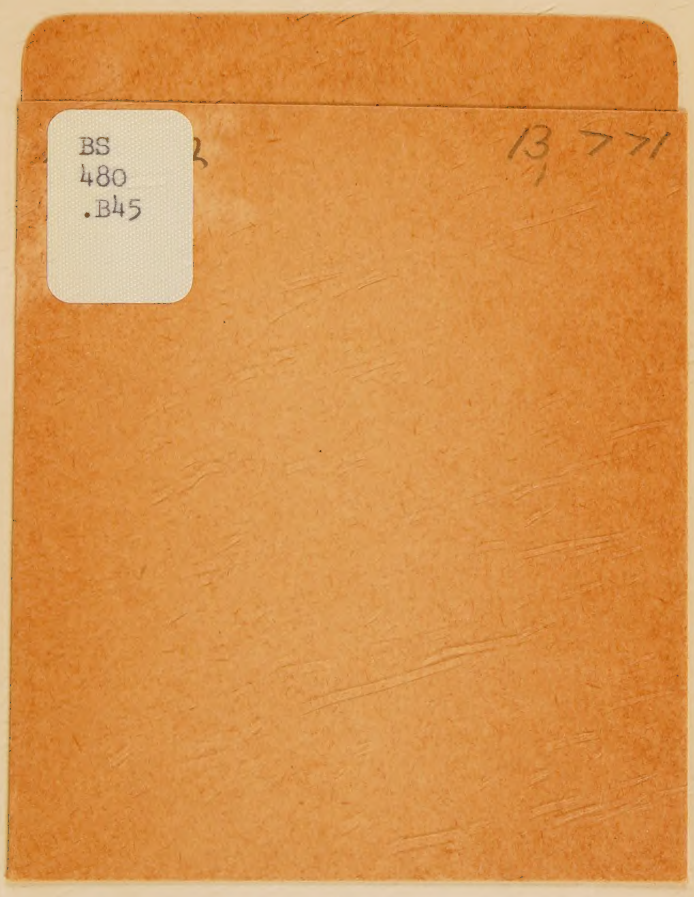

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